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STORIES OF THE FUTURE

Volume 1

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The ALIEN

A NOVELET

By H. J. CAMPBELL

Q The aliens had laid their plans carefully. How were they to know that the empty tanks of the abandoned space ship had contained water—or that there was no such thing as dimolecular hydrogen peroxide in the Solar System?

ILLUSTRATED BY ROY HUNT

YOU see her as soon as you open the cabin door, and she looks quite dead. So you slip inside and close the door behind you. The other cabins along the corridor of the drifting spaceship can wait. You've got enough to keep you occupied here.

The air in your helmet is stuffy, and the plastic's going fogged even though it's not supposed to. You wish you knew whether there was air in the ship, but there's no easy way of telling. Besides, you haven't had time. You'll just have to keep the helmet on for a bit.

You lean your back against the hard metal door and look at her. She reminds you of a line from Sassoon—*why do you lie with your leg? ungainly huddled . . . ?*

She's ungainly, all right. One leg is crumpled up on the bunk in a way that's going to put creases in her crimson slacks. Her head and shoulders droop over the edge, her green sweater and yellow hair making her look like a daffodil that needs water badly.

You are going over to her any minute, but before that you want to study the cabin, so you let your gaze sweep over it. It's a perfectly ordinary cabin, except for the girl on the bunk. A little furniture; a few books. Nothing really luxurious from your way of thinking. No indication of why the girl should be lying so awkwardly dead on an empty, drifting spaceship. Everything is in its place—except the girl's head, which ought to be on the pillow.

You go across and turn her over and straighten her legs just because you want to see her face and because you want her head to lie on the pillow. She'll look better that way, you think.

And as you turn her over, you realize that she isn't dead at all. At least, the smooth swell of her breast is rising and falling in a way that usually denotes respiration. But her face is as white as dead flesh, and her eyes are peacefully closed.

Nonchalantly, impersonally, staring down at her, you slap her face. It has no effect. So you slap her again, twice as hard. Still no effect. No real effect, that is. The slapping certainly brings a pink flush to her cheeks and makes her look fairly pretty. But it doesn't make her open her eyes. She simply lies there breathing, just breathing.

So, you think, there must be air in the cabin. You take your helmet off and feel grateful for the coolness of the air that makes love to your face. It's a little stale, the air, but not as stale as that in the helmet. One day, maybe, they'll invent an air-purifier which really does that. Until then, you'll take it stale but cool.

The girl, you imagine, is drugged. Ordinary sleep wouldn't protect her from those slaps. So you decide to wait there until she comes round. You grab a chair and sit facing the girl and the

door at the same time. So far you haven't found anyone else on the ship. But that doesn't mean there can't be anyone else.

So you watch the door and the girl, and you think about things. You've got all the time in the world—all worlds. Your own ship is riding along outside at matched velocity, so there's nothing to worry about on that score. And a man with your money doesn't ever have to be anywhere at any particular time, so you can just go on drifting with the drugged girl for ever, if necessary. You hope it won't be necessary, though as you glance at her face, you can think of less pleasant ways of spending eternity.

The yellow hair looks as though it hasn't been neglected, but there are no signs that it has become a fetish. The eyelids are closed so you can't see what color her eyes are, but you can guess that they're blue. They ought to be, anyway. And the smooth skin over her cheek bones is more like a baby's than a peach's. You never did like peaches. Not that you are overfond of babies. . . .

She is, you decide in a detached sort of fashion, beautiful. You wonder again what the hell she's doing in a stupor on an empty ship that's just drifting along without drive and without apparent direction.

When you first saw the ship from your own telescaner, you thought maybe it had been pirated—such things still happen occasionally. But then, as you brought in the magnifier and studied every exposed inch of the hull and found no holes, no dents, you began to change your mind. Pirates usually shoot first—and straight. So you tried to contact the ship on your radio. No dice. Either there was something wrong, or everything was all right and they just wanted to stay anonymous. But if there was a possibility of something being wrong, you had to investigate. You told yourself that it was your moral duty to look in and see if they needed help. Even so, you knew damned well that you only came across because you thought it might relieve a little of the boredom you'd been feeling lately.

So you put on a spacesuit and kicked your way over to the bigger ship. The airlock gave you no trouble. You walked down the corridors and opened every door you came to. In the engine room everything looked fine and the fuel guages showed a big reserve. But there was no one there. Nor was there anyone in any of the other chambers. Only this one. Only this girl, this beautiful, drugged girl.

Now, with your helmet off, you can hear the silence. No sound anywhere. You've never known a ship to be so soundless. Usually there's the quiet throb or purr from the motors, a buzz of talk from the passengers, coming through the walls; footfalls and laughing and coughing and creaking. But there's none of that here. Not on this ship. This ship's dead.

You wonder whether it's dead all over, and you want to complete your tour of inspection, but you're afraid that if you leave the cabin the girl will be gone when you get back. There's no reason to think that. You just do. That's the way it's happened in so many books you've read.

Still, you'd certainly like to find the captain's cabin. You could have a look at the papers and get an idea what ship it was, where registered, where bound, the passenger list and so on. If there are any papers.

The more you think of it, the more you feel that there aren't any papers. Leaving them, you imagine, would be a mistake on the part of whoever was responsible for the emptiness of the ship.

Still, they left the girl . . .

You look at her again. You're getting tired of waiting. All your thinking isn't getting you anywhere. You haven't got enough data. The girl can give you more.

You get up, go across and slap her again. You get a slightly guilty sort of feeling that you like slapping her, and that makes you stop doing it. Anyway, you seem to have got through this time.

She stirs. She stiffens herself and then relaxes again. She opens her mouth and then closes it. She grunts and then goes silent. She ends up almost exactly as she was before. But now there's blood in her cheeks and a little artery is pulsing gently in her temple.

You look at the artery and guess that she must be about thirty, plus or minus two or three. Then you notice a couple of embryo crow's-feet at the corners of her eyes, you reckon you can forget about the minus. Call her thirty-two and you'd probably be right, you think. A nice age. Your own.

But this isn't helping any, so you give in to the pleasure of slapping her again, several times. You get a better response, and you think you've done enough so you go back to your chair and watch her.

She wriggles about a bit, waves her arms lazily in the air and lets them drop back, one hand to her forehead, grunting in a deliciously

feminine way all the while. She twiddles her toes and draws her knees up, resplendent in rather crimped crimson slacks. Then she opens her eyes.

Her head is a little on one side so her gaze comes out into the cabin. It shoots past you and comes to rest on the bulkhead nearby, as though she suddenly discovers how interesting rivets can be. You don't say anything.

A moment later, her eyes change position and she's looking straight at you. They are blue eyes, all right, and for all the expression in them she might be idly comparing you with the rivets and coming out on their side.

"Hullo," you say.

You've certainly got the first word in, even if it isn't much of a word, and it ought to help to break the ice that's covering her eyes.

"Maybe you can help," she says. "It depends on how much intelligence you've got."

So, you think, this one doesn't prevaricate or circumlocute. This one deals with essentials. Greetings are out. Explanations are out.

An intelligent blonde! This is certainly something you'd never find in a book! All that worries you is that by the looks of things you're going to have trouble keeping up with her.

"What happened?" you ask, and feel from the way she looks at you that she thinks it's a dumb question.

"I thought you might know," she says, not hiding her disappointment. "Know the details, I mean. I can only extrapolate."

"Do that. Then maybe I *could* help."

She hasn't taken her eyes off you and she doesn't now. She just lets them flicker over you as though she's working out what kind of a man you are. You begin to feel that she may be a little too smart, a little too clever. You're not going to trust her till you know her better. And you hope to do that.

"I was in this cabin, resting in the bunk, when the door burst open and two men came in," she explains. "They didn't give me a chance to do anything. Before I could move they injected me with something. I passed out."

It doesn't sound right, somehow. "You didn't even scream?" you ask her.

"I didn't have time. Besides—I've never screamed in my life."

You can well believe that latter bit. "And where did they inject you?"

"In my arm," she says, giving you the old look, the look they always give.

"Okay. Now extrapolate," you say.

"Well, I suppose the ship was attacked. By whom and for what reason I can't say. The men who injected me were strangers. They must have come from outside the ship. Injecting me was their method of getting me out of the way. I've never been attacked by pirates before."

You get up and start walking about the cabin, not because you want to stretch but because you can't stand those two blue eyes washing you clean all over.

"What makes you think they were pirates?" Even as you ask the question you begin to wonder why she isn't showing any interest in the rest of the people who must have been on the ship. There's something odd about her. Damned odd!

"What else?" she replies. "If they weren't pirates in the ordinary sense, they were in the legal sense."

You don't bother to ask what she means by ordinary sense. You can guess. But it's interesting that she feels a possibility that they weren't ordinary pirates. This will give you a lead-in to the other question you want to ask.

"Was there anyone of importance on the ship?"

"I don't know. I don't know who the other passengers were. Nobody *seemed* terribly important."

So she didn't know who the other passengers were, but she knew that her attackers were strangers. You don't ask her about that because for the moment you don't want to pin her down. You don't want her to think you find her story rather odd.

"Tell me about you," she says, and you know she doesn't mean your life-history.

"I was cruising around when I spotted your ship. I sent the usual call and got no reply. Scanners showed me that the ship wasn't under drive, which is unusual out here. I came over. Here I am."

"What did you find?"

"Nothing."

"The ship is empty?" Her voice has an edge to it, but you're not sure it's a natural edge.

"Except for you and me. Does that worry you?"

"No, but it puzzles me. Where have the rest gone? And why was I left aboard?"

"Try extrapolating," you say tiredly, and swing towards the door. "I'll set the ship for Earth. The whole thing can be settled there. Don't interfere with the settings."

She's still looking at you as you go out of the door, and her look tells you that she is not used to being told what not to do. But you can't help that. The ship has to be taken to Earth and the whole matter investigated. The law requires you to do what you are doing. Besides—why should she object . . . ?

So you get along to the engine room and poke around. The first thing you look for is the airlock control. You pull it over and know that every exit from the ship is now fast. Blue-eyes won't be giving you the slip while you're setting the motors.

A brief study of the charts and a few readings from the instruments tell you where you are. You set up a time-delay circuit that will cut in the motors and orient the ship towards Earth in fifteen minutes. Then you leave the engine room, locking the door behind you.

Back in the girl's cabin you tell her what you've done. "The time-lag will just give me enough time to get back to my ship and tag along beside you. I'll come aboard for the landing when we're nearer Earth."

"I can land the ship," she says. She is looking at you with more interest than before. You can guess that your thick black hair is having something of an effect on her, and that she is not exactly repulsed by your rugged features and tall body. You know you're handsome and there's no sense in denying it. With Blue-eyes around, you're glad you are handsome.

"Even so," you say, "I'll come aboard for the landing. If you can also work a radio, you can get in touch with me any time you want. The radio room's intact. Be seeing you."

You start to go out again and she calls to you. "Aren't you interested in my name?"

You turn at the door and give her your very best smile. "I always name my women myself. You're Marie. Marie Celeste."

Then you get away quickly and slip back to the engine room. You fix up another time-delay monitor, this time for the airlocks.

You get to the main airlock just as it opens. Then you jerk on your helmet and start across to your ship, knowing that the monitor will keep the airlocks fast for some hours. The only place the girl can go is space, but she seems the kind who might even do that if

she had a strong enough reason for not going to Earth—and you begin to suspect that she has.

On your ship you hasten to the control cabin and stand there with your hand on the firing lever and your eyes on the scanner. Dead on the dot the motors of the big ship spit flame. Your hand comes down and your own motors start coughing. When velocities are matched and vectors paralleled, you lock the drive. A few moments later the hyperdrive snaps in. The telescanners tell you that the big ship is still there beside you. So, you are both streaking along at something a good deal in excess of the speed of light. That will bring you both in the region of Earth in not too many hours.

Now all you have to do is sit back and wonder what's going to happen when you land.

II

ABOUT a million miles from Earth the hyperdrive cuts out. That's the way you planned it. Ordinary drive is fast enough for the last lap. And now it's safe for you to go outside again. You just want to check that she's still there. You'd look silly dragging an empty ship down to the surface and trying to convince the authorities about what happened. At least, that's what you tell yourself as you shoot across to the big ship again.

A few minutes later you open the cabin door. Marie is still on the bunk. But this time you notice she isn't in slacks and sweater. The light that comes on as you press the button makes her bare arms gleam and shows up the folds in the slinky nightdress she's wearing.

She stirs and looks at you. It's a nice look. Tells you quite a lot. Just what you wanted to know. She sits up and the nightdress clings to her. She knows it does.

"Anything wrong?" she drawls.

"Not one little thing," you say, smiling. "I thought you might be lonely. It's been a dull trip. Thought you might like to talk."

She raises an eyebrow, nicely. "Talk?"

You laugh and go across and swing yourself onto the bunk beside her. It's a luxury ship, all right. The bunks are double.

"Aren't you going to put the light out?" she says.

You like the way she doesn't go coy or coquettish. "I always talk better with the light on," you say. Then you take her in your arms.

A good while later you suddenly realize that the ships must be getting near Earth and that several dull but essential adjustments have to be made. So you give her a love-tap and roll off the bunk. She rouses from the dreamy state she's been in and smiles at you. You smile back and tell her that you're going to handle the landing now.

"Get dressed," you say. "And pack a bag. You must come and stay with me. I've got a nice house."

"Have you?" she says, and there's a sort of self-satisfied gleam in her eye that's a bit disturbing. You start to feel that *you've* been conquered.

She's still smiling and gleaming as you go out of the door. Then you start up a gleam of your own as you move towards the engine room, but it's not self-satisfaction that causes it. While you were in there with her you stroked and kissed every inch of her arms. And the light was on.

And there was no sign of an injection mark.

III

EARTH looks good as you lead Marie away from the Interrogation Center. So good that it takes your mind off the crazy situation you've landed yourself in. The space port is set deep in the countryside, screened by tall green trees, the kind of green you find only on Earth. And the air is fresh and cool and clear. And the sun is playing a golden symphony all around you, with little bits of *forte* here and there as it glints on the metal of helicabs that circle the port like expectant seagulls, waiting for the red flash that will call them down to pick up a fare.

A flash darts out from the control tower even as you look at it, and one of the helicabs drops down with whirling rotors onto the wide flat roof of the Playdome. Tiny specks cross the roof and mount the heli—. It wings away upwards to disappear against the bright, almost cruel blue of the sky.

It's good to be back, you think. The song they always sing. You take in a deep, satisfying breath—and then realize that Marie is speaking to you.

"Sorry, I didn't hear," you say.

She repeats: "What will they do? They can't do anything to me, can they?"

"Nothing at all," you reply. "Not a single thing. Now let's take one of these helicabs to my place. You'd probably like to eat."

She agrees that she would, so you lead her over towards the Playdome, which is the only place that helicabs can take off and land without fouling the giant rockets from the launching apron.

As you walk you think over what happened in the Interrogation Center. You wouldn't be surprised if they think *you* are in on this cooty set-up. The Interrogation officer certainly looked skeptical when Marie told him her story. And when she couldn't tell him the name of the ship, where it had been bound, or the name of the captain—well, the man had seemed to find it difficult to stay polite.

All Marie had told him was that she picked up a passage on the ship at the Pleasure Field on Japetus, off Saturn. She had just wanted to go on a long quiet cruise. She hinted at an unhappy love affair. She said she had no interest in the name of the ship or the captain and she wasn't a bit concerned about where the vessel was bound.

She had taken a passage on it in order to get away from people, and that was just what she had done. She was sorry to be so unhelpful, but she didn't see why everything should be blamed on her. There was no law against staying in one's cabin, was there? No, the Interrogation officer had said, there wasn't. But there was a look in his eye which led you to believe that he thought there ought to be.

In the helicab, Marie purrs with delight as you pass over some nice country. She seems to have forgotten her sad love affair. You wonder why. Could be you. Could be the scenery. Could be that she never had one . . .

At your house you let her wander about exploring while you go through your mail. Nothing important except perhaps the plea from your bankers to let them take a bit more out of your current account and invest it. You couldn't care less what they do. You'll never use it. Sometimes you wish you'd never invented the cheap power source that keeps the royalties rolling in. Once, you couldn't get enough money. Now you've got too much.

Still, you write a few checks for the charities among the pile, and guess that will take care of a few more thousand.

Then Marie comes back and you stop thinking about yourself. You're grateful to her for that.

"Beautiful," she says, beaming about the place.

"You are indeed," you grin.

She laughs, but you don't think she's really amused. There seems

to be a sort of restraint about her. As though this is something she has planned. Something she knew would happen in just this way, and so is not really exciting. It disturbs you.

"Did you say something about eating?" she demands.

You don't answer her, but go across to the wall and press a couple of buttons. Simultaneously, or so it seems, a table comes up from the floor in the middle of the room and two chairs rise up beside it. Then, from the ceiling down comes a tray of food. It settles like a steam-rollered butterfly on the table.

You're watching Marie all the time. She doesn't look surprised, but she looks interested. She looks as though she is more or less familiar with these things. Which is a little odd. You'd have expected her to comment on the table at least.

For the descending table is of your own design—and unique . . .

That disturbs you, too. She's a very disturbing girl, is Marie.

You sit down at the table with a preoccupied air, and Marie comments on it.

"I was thinking about something in my mail," you lie.

"Bad?"

"Not bad, but—" you laugh, "—disturbing. I shall have to go out soon. You'll be okay here?"

"Perfect. I'll pine for you while you're gone. Will you like that?"

This lovey-dovey stuff is beginning to bore you, but you suppose you'll have to go on with it for a while. "Love it," you say, and try to sound as though you might mean it.

The Interrogation Center is the first place you call, after the meal. That stuff about the mail was nonsense. You wonder if Marie knew it.

It takes a little while and quite a bit of talking before the Interrogation officer will give you the name of the firm that's looking into the identity of the ship you found. Then, probably because he knows you and hasn't really any justification for not telling you, he says it's a private inquiry company called Checkers. You thank him and wonder whether to slip him a check. But he looks so pallidly conscientious and he's probably so worried by the whole thing that he'd book you for bribery. So you leave him to stew among the piles of papers around him and head for Checkers.

As you pass the Security Hangar in your neat little jet roadster, you wonder whether it would be a good idea to drop in and see the men at work on the ship. But you guess it will be under heavy guard

now and you wouldn't be allowed on board. Strange, when you were wandering all over the vessel a while back, just as if you owned it.

Owned it. Who owned it? Who paid for the metal and the men who put the metal together? Who took the rake-off from the fares and the gambling saloons aboard it? You don't know. You hope to find out. And that's where Checkers comes in.

They have a fine block of offices in the city, and as you park the roadster and stare up at the facade you reckon they must do a fair amount of business.

Inside, your name means a lot to the redhead at the desk and you get shown up right away to the offices of the man who's handling your particular problem.

He's a tough-looking, rough-looking, intelligent-faced man with eyes that don't dance about and a chin that's even firmer than the eyes. He's got big hands, wide shoulders and a massive chest. You reckon he hasn't been sitting behind a desk all his life.

His name's Marson Cade and you gather from that that he was one of the first kids to be born on Mars. Pioneers in those days had a yen for sentimentality. But Marson Cade hasn't inherited it, you guess.

"So you want to know how far we've got?" he says, looking at you as though he means to recognize you if he ever sees you again.

You're sitting in a soft chair in front of his desk in his plush office, and the events out in space seem miles away—as indeed they are. And Marson Cade is so undramatic that it's difficult to keep in mind the almost unprecedented thing that's happened. Still, you try.

"I went over the ship when I was on it and couldn't find a thing that would identify it," you say. "I thought maybe with instruments you'd be better able to do that than I would."

"What sort of instruments?" Cade asks.

"Well, X-ray, for example. All engines have serial numbers stamped inside them where they can't be filed away. Did you find one on the ship?"

Cade purses his lips and looks away. Evidently he has memorized you by now. "There was a girl on the ship," he says. "What do you think of her?"

You're pretty certain that Cade has a copy of the record taken in the Interrogation Center, but you want to play for time.

"I think she's very beautiful and attractive," you say.

Cade gives you a long, steady look and compresses his lips. If it's

time you want, you'd better not play for it that way, you think. So you stop playing.

"There's a lot about her that puzzles me," you say. "A lot that disturbs me, too. I'm not sure that I trust her."

"What things and why not?" Cade says.

You're beginning to like him. He isn't like the Interrogation officer, who was primly official and terribly frustrated. Cade is solid, sensible and free from the taint of officialdom and conceit. You reckon you can work with him. You reckon you can tell him things that you couldn't tell the Interrogation officer.

"These are some things that won't be on record," you say. Cade nods. He understands. "First of all, though she certainly acted as though she had been drugged, and said she'd been, I couldn't find an injection mark on her arm." Cade must know what you are driving at but he doesn't even smirk. "Then, although she says she doesn't know who the captain was or who were the passengers, she told me that the men who injected her were strangers to the ship. On top of all that, she doesn't behave right. She shows no interest in the rest of the people who were on the ship; and she seems too damned confident about the way things are working out. It's almost as though—as though this is all part of a prearranged scheme. Sounds crazy, I guess, but that's the feeling I've got. That's what disturbs me."

Cade doesn't say anything for a while. He just stares out of the window and thinks. Then he brings his gaze back to you and starts to ask questions.

"Where is she staying on Earth?"

"With me."

"What's she doing for money?"

"At the moment } using mine."

"You in love with her?"

"No."

"Sure?"

"Yes."

And so it goes on. He gives you a regular grilling. But you don't mind. All the questions are sensible and you can see where they are leading. Cade is simply satisfying himself that you're on the level.

"All right," he says at last. "I guess you're okay. I think we can work together. It's not a bad plan to have someone on the inside.

But don't forget, you're working with us, not with the Peterside woman—"

"The who?" you interrupt.

"Oh, you wouldn't know that, would you? We checked up on her, of course. Didn't take us long to track her down by photographs and a few peculiar marks. She's Marie Peterside. That's all. Doesn't mean much. She's fairly rich—or was a year or two back when her only relative, an aunt, died and left her a stack. Since then she's been getting rid of it fast, by the way she's been living. Nothing coming in. A lot going out. Pleasure-seeker, nothing more."

Strange coincidence, you think, that you chose her correct christian name, but only coincidence. But you find it hard to believe that she's just a pleasure-seeker. You've known a few like that and usually they aren't quite so self-possessed, quite so intelligent, or—quite so disturbing.

"Okay," you say, harking back, "so I'm working with you. That's what I want to do. I've got no ties with Marie. Now what have you found out about the ship?"

"Full circle, eh?" says Cade, with a grin. "I see you keep on until you get what you want. Well, now that we're working together I don't mind telling you. We've X-rayed every inch of that engine and a good few inches of other things. No number."

That brings you upright in your chair. But you don't ask any silly questions. You just think about it. Since way back when, the law has been very strict about engine numbers on spaceships—and every engine yard knows it. Even you, with all your money, wouldn't like to try to get an engine built without a number. And once the number's in, it stays. There's no way of getting it out.

"There's more," says Cade, after giving you a minute to think about the number business. "We went right through the ship—had a hundred men on the job—and we didn't find any water. Tanks were there. But no water."

"Empty water tanks?" you say, because the meaning hasn't got through yet.

"That's right. Now why would pirates take water from the ship? You don't have to answer, because they didn't. Our chemists have proved that there *never was any water in the tanks.*"

He says the last few words slowly and deliberately. And you suddenly see what he's driving at. A great cruising vessel sets out on a

long trip without water! A vessel that's apparently a good few years old has never had water in its tanks!

"That's crazy!" you exclaim.

Cade nods. "Sure it is. When I first heard, I thought maybe *I* was crazy. Then this report came through—just a minute or two before you arrived." He pokes at a sheet of paper on his desk. "It's the analysts' reports. They took samples of everything on the ship and pulled them to pieces chemically. Everything was routine and ordinary—except the fuel."

"What about the fuel?" you ask, and you're more tense and excited than you've been for years.

"The hydrogen peroxide is dimolecular."

You start to open your mouth but Cade comes out with: "So that's crazy, too! I know. There's no such thing as dimolecular hydrogen peroxide. Look everywhere and you won't find it. It doesn't exist—*on Earth, or in the Solar System.*"

He says those few words slowly and deliberately, too. As he says them, a cold prickling eats into your muscles, and there's a hard unpleasant twisting in your abdomen. The office is cooled by the latest methods, but you're sweating all the same. You suddenly realize that your hands are hurting, and when you look down at them they are gripping the chair-arms like an epileptic's. You release them and sit back, swallowing hard.

Cade is staring at you levelly, the way he was when you first came into the room. You can guess that your reaction has satisfied him about your lack of complicity in this affair. But that's a side issue.

"I see what you mean," you say. "That's very important, isn't it?"

"Just about the most important thing that's ever happened to Earth," Cade answers. Laconically he adds: "We've never had a visitor from the stars before."

"She's alien," you murmur. Your thoughts are all mixed up. "She doesn't need water. I slept with her." You can't *believe* that she isn't human. She seemed so warmly, yieldingly human back there on the ship, on the bunk . . .

"That appears to be it," Cade says, breaking in on your reverie. "If she isn't alien, then she's certainly been taken for a ride by one! So what do we do?"

You know that he isn't really asking you. Even if he were you wouldn't be able to help. Not until you've sorted it all out. Not until you've thought about it for a while.

"This is the way I look at it," Cade continues. "There were no pirates. There was no captain and no passengers. She was on that ship alone from the beginning, I'm sure. And she had no water. That means she isn't Marie Peterside. Easy enough to assume the identity of a girl whose only relative died a while ago; a girl who's got pots of money to spend on luxury cruises. So this—this alien floats around in space waiting to be picked up by someone and taken to Earth—the central planet of the Solar Federation. You turn up and oblige. She should be grateful to you."

You ignore that. You think it's a bit cruel, though you can't blame the man for letting it slip out. You certainly seem to have done just what she wanted by dragging her down to Earth in record time—and thinking all the while that she might not want to come! Still . . .

"What are you going to do? Have her arrested?"

Cade shakes his heavy head. "Look, you and I are the only ones who know about this—apart from the analysts, and I can take care of them. We've got to be careful. Arresting her won't do any good. On what charge? And what do we do with her if she's guilty? How does that help us know what's going on? No, this woman—if she *is* a woman—didn't come here to stare at the sights. There's some better reason behind her trip. We've got to find out what it is."

You get up from your chair and start pacing while he talks. Your emotions won't let you stay sitting down.

"Whatever it is, it's bound to be something nasty," Cade goes on. "Else she wouldn't have come so surreptitiously. So we watch our step. My men are still working on the problem. I want you to help from your end. Stay with—we'll call her Marie Peterside, for convenience—stay with Marie Peterside and watch everything she does. Don't let her out of your sight more than you can help. Observe her with an eye opened by what you have learned here. And report as often as possible and when anything new crops up—any time day or night." He laughs. "From her photographs I should say that a lot of men would take great pleasure in sticking that close to her."

"Not if they knew she was an alien," you say.

"Maybe. But for Jupiter's sake don't let her see that you know it. As far as she's concerned you are still puzzled by this pirate attack. I'll see to it that the officials stay that way, too. This is a big thing, and only you and I can handle it."

"You think we *can* handle it?" you ask, doubtfully.

Cade lets out a long breath. You reckon he has doubts, too, though

he has to be optimistic at the start of the quest. "We've got to, man, we've got to! Now get to hell out of here and let me work!"

So, in a state that seems more like a dream than reality, you go back to your roadster. You stand by it for a moment, staring down at the steering wheel, not seeing it, just thinking about that time back in the ship, on the bunk. You can't get it out of your mind. And it hurts like hell!

"Hullo," she says, and you swing around with popping eyes to find the lady herself standing right beside you.

"I got the feeling that life was passing me by, so I thought I'd take a trip into town. I'm glad I bumped into you. Now you can take me home—if you are going home."

You've got to keep up the pretense, you tell yourself. She's a woman, remember that. She's not an alien. She's a woman. She's a woman. You happen to know . . .

"Sure I'm going back," you grin at her. "Hop in. Have a nice trip in town?"

While she's telling you about it, you start up the roadster and pull away from the Checkers building. You wonder if she followed you there, and whether she now knows what firm is on the job. Your mind is full of thoughts that won't align. And she's talking beside you, and you never did like people talking to you while you're driving. And her talking about mundane things makes it worse.

It makes it so much worse that you don't see the other roadster until it's far too late to do anything about it. In the split second before the crash, you wonder if you are going to die and whether you'll get hurt in the process.

Then the two roadsters meet, their jets whine, and the resulting crash of sound and crushing blow knocks all thoughts from your mind.

When you wake up again to a crazily teetering world that's washed all over pink, you know that you are not dead, but that the roadster is. You get to your feet unsteadily, helped by someone's arm, and stare down at the tangled wreckage. Yours and the other fellow's are both beyond repair. Thank God for insurance, you think.

Then you see the blood. And you remember Marie. You let out a yell and plunge forward and start to scrabble furiously in the wreckage.

But a grim-faced policeman pulls you away, drags you off through

the crowd of onlookers and into the waiting ambulance. There he sits you down and gives you a drink. You hope it's whiskey, but it's sal volatile and you spit it out and glare at the cop.

"Where is she?" you demand. You reckon the act you are putting on must look good, for the policeman lowers his eyes and wriggles his big hulk.

"Take it easy, feller," the cop says. "Take it real easy. That was a bad smash. She got—badly hurt. The other driver's all right; just a few scratches, like you. You were lucky. She—well, she was badly hurt, like I said."

You can see that the man feels terrible about it, even though it's part of his job. You think you'd better help him out.

"You mean—she's dead?" you say, in what you judge to be just the right deep tone of infinite grief.

The policeman nods and starts looking at his hands. "Yeah. Yeah—that's right. I'm sorry, mister, I—"

"That's all right," you tell him, getting up and looking brave. "I'll be getting along now. Nothing I can do, I suppose?" You try to give the impression of a man who wants to be alone with his suffering.

"Well—" the cop hesitates. "I hate to bother you, but there're one or two details . . ."

"All right," you breathe out. "Go ahead. Try to be quick, though."

When he's finished writing it all down in his little book, he turns to you and holds out his hand. "Good-bye, mister. You're taking this on the chin. I hope I take it like that if I ever have to. You've got guts."

You pat his arm, feel a twinge of guilt and hurry out of the ambulance. He was a nice guy. It seemed a pity to kid him that way. But it wouldn't have been politic not to. You have to show mourning for a dead lady passenger. You can't go around clapping your hands in the air and whooping for joy, even if that's the way you feel—as you feel right now.

She's gone. True, it was a nasty way to go, but for the world's sake, for Earth's sake, and for the sake of every man, woman and child in the Solar System—it is a good thing that she has gone. And, of course, it won't be doing *you* any harm.

So with a lighter heart than you ever guessed you'd have at this juncture, you start out for home. You don't go back to Checkers just yet. You don't feel like talking about it now. You want to savor it

mentally before handing it over to Cade. The man will be in his office all night, you guess. You can call on him later.

When the cab drops you down at your house, you are planning a nice double whiskey to wash away the taste of sal volatile. Whiskey, then a cigar, a good one. You go into the place.

"Hullo," she says. "Back early."

And there, miraculously, incredibly, impossibly in front of you is a smiling, alluring, very much alive Marie Peterside.

IV

YOU can't keep up the pretense any more, despite Cade's instructions. You just can't go on acting naturally and unconcerned. Besides, from the look that darts into her eyes, she must have observed your utter astonishment.

You walk across to a chair and motion her to do the same, all thought of whiskey forgotten. She follows your directions, but you can see that she's alert and on her guard. Suddenly, you are very tired of it all.

"Look," you say. "We'll have to have a showdown. Let's stop acting."

The girl looks at you keenly, and there's no friendship in her gaze; only a hard, determined expression.

"I imagine something happened to my duplicate," she says, evenly, and once again you are struck by her directness and acuity. "That is the main fault with human tissues. They are so very mortal."

"Your duplicate was mashed up in a car crash," you say. "So you admit you are not human. What's it all about?"

She shrugs, very humanly. "That must be obvious to you. My race will conquer Earth and the Federation's planets. Humans only waste their resources. We can extract full benefit from them."

"So your race is unethical and militant," you say. You don't know why you say it. But you have to say something, and the whole situation is so much like a dream sequence that you are completely disorientated.

"Not really," she replies. "No more than humans are when they slaughter cattle for sustenance, or exploit the labor of alien planets. You are convinced that you are superior to the creatures you subjugate—that you have something, some higher quality they lack. So it is with us. On our scale of existence, on our plane of being, hu-

mans are so much cattle. The only difference, perhaps, is that where cattle are useful to you, humans would be superfluous under our system."

You can see that she has something. Whether she is right about the superiority of her race you cannot tell. But if what she says is true, then her analogy seems to hold. Which is tough luck for the human race.

You should be boiling over with rage and indignation by now. You should be lamming into her for her treachery and deceit, for her calm assumption that her race will succeed. You should, indeed, be doing something about clipping her claws. But you are tired, so tired. Maybe it is the reaction from the car crash, but somehow the whole thing seems a little remote. You find yourself looking at it as a bystander, an impersonal observer.

"And how do you plan to effect the conquest?" you ask. "What is your role in the great scheme?"

"Quite simple. We are under no illusions about human resistance, about human weapons. We know that your race would fight to the last man—impelled by some irrational sense of honor and duty wherein the individual fight for survival is subdued by tradition and ethics. In fact, of course, the driving force is cowardice, but we have to allow for it all the same."

You are not quite sure what she is getting at, but the ideas seem to have some substance. You haven't really got the energy to sort them out.

"So I shall plunge the Solar Federation into economic confusion," she continues. "By manipulating the stock market and one or two other things, I can easily cause such a widespread upheaval that any resistance to our attack will be feeble and unorganized."

"Clever," you say. "Clever, but expensive. Very, very expensive."

"It's not clever at all. Just simple common sense—*our* kind of common sense. And as for the expense—aren't you the richest man in the Federation?"

You had vaguely guessed that she was leading up to that. It seemed the obvious thing, now that you know the facts.

"What makes you think I'll let you use my money?" you ask her.

She smiles at you. You can't help thinking that she really does look attractive. So darned attractive that you can't, in your present lethargic state, work up any animosity against her.

"I don't think you'll let me use it," she says. "But I don't need your permission. I shall just use it."

That rouses you a little. "Huh? I'd like to see that!"

She shakes her head. "I'm afraid you won't be able to. A pity, but necessary."

Suddenly you get an inkling of what she's driving at and it fills you with apprehension. You suddenly see the hard inflexible purpose behind her sweet smile; you see the hard brittle determination at the back of her eyes. And you're scared. So scared that you can't move. All you can do is sit and stare at her, wanting to scream with the terror of it; wanting to jump up and run and run and run—away from the blue eyes, away from the yellow hair, the sweet smile and the dark hideous intensity of her purpose.

"I'm really sorry," she says, and somehow you believe her. "I like you a lot. Back on the ship—you remember—that was—wonderful. We don't have anything like it among my race. I shall always be grateful to you for that."

Grateful, you think. You got into bed with her mainly because you wanted to see if she had an injection mark. And she's grateful. You begin to feel that maybe her race is superior. And that helps to take off some of the fear. But only some.

You can feel something being drawn out of you, as though something in the essence of you is evaporating. And you know it is your life that's going. You know that she is using some alien power to kill you, almost painlessly, simply by taking away whatever it is that makes tissue live.

As you look at her, see the slight sadness on her face behind the sheen of mental effort, you realize that you do love her, and that such love is so foolish; as foolish as it is inevitable. You are going to die, in a way that you never knew. And you are going to die loving the one who kills you.

Idly, even as the last spark of life leaves you, you realize that such things have happened before. But not to you . . .

V

YOU do indeed feel sad as you look across at the slumped figure of the Earthman. It is an odd feeling altogether, for you have within you all his memories, right up to the last moment when the final sliver of his life-force passed into you. He was a nice guy—

especially as seen from the point of view of the tissue complex of a human female.

A nice guy. But he had to die. It's a pity he found out so soon. You'd have liked some repetition of the exciting thing you and he did back on the ship. There's nothing like it among your own race. Among your own race, the intellect is all. So much so that even bodies are unnecessary.

And that reminds you that you must change your present material form. The role of Marie Peterside is finished.

It is the work of a few moments only to remove all your clothes and those of the dead man. Then, by concentrating and evoking the powers that were born in you a hundred light years away among the stars, you convert the body of the dead man into that of Marie Peterside; you then convert your own into that of the dead man. You put on his clothes, and dress him in the apparel of Marie Peterside.

The job is nearly finished. You look around for something with which to finish it, and find it in a heavy ornamental vase. You bring the vase crashing down on the body's head, splitting the bone and exposing the brain. Now there is a good reason why the body should be dead.

It's time you reported it, you think, and with the dead man's memories you know just how to do it.

You go into the room where the televizor is and ring through to Checkers. When you finally get on to Marson Cade his face seems as familiar as if you had sat in his office yourself.

"She's dead," you tell him.

Cade looks grim. "I know. We identified her body at the mortuary. You were lucky to get out of the crash alive."

You realize that he's talking about your duplicate. "Let me bring you up to date," you say. And you tell him about coming home and finding another Marie Peterside waiting. You draw on the dead man's memories to supply authentic details.

"I couldn't go through with it," you continue. "I couldn't hide my surprise and she tumbled to the fact that I knew she was an alien. She attacked me. I had to kill her. What do we do now?"

Cade shrugs. "Nothing. She's dead and that's that. I don't suppose it's solved our problem, but we are in the clear temporarily. No doubt someone else will come from wherever she came from. We'll just have to wait until then. Anyway, we'll know better how to deal with it. You just forget the whole thing."

"That won't be easy," you tell him. "Such things don't go out of your memory without effort. But I'll try. Will you do something about the body?"

"Sure. I'll have it picked up right away. Not that it will help us. The aliens made the body perfect in all respects. But it'll save you a lot of trouble."

As you ring off you realize anew how easy it is to deceive humans. The body wasn't perfect in all respects. It didn't have to eat and it didn't have to drink. If the humans were as clever as they thought they were, they would have discovered that in the duplicate's body.

Even so, you are faintly disturbed about that mistake with the water tanks. Understandable, of course. The ship from which your own had been modeled had drifted out into interstellar space and got lost. By the time it reached the region of your own planet everyone was dead and every scrap of food and water had long ago been consumed. So your engineers found empty tanks and duplicated them. How were they to know the tanks had once contained water? There is no water on your planet save that which is synthesized.

The mistake about the fuel is less understandable; indeed, it is completely unjustified, and when you get back you are going to have some hard words to say to the chemists. Just because hydrogen peroxide exists in dimolecular form on your own planet was no excuse for the chemists not to find *some* trace of fuel in the lost ship's tanks.

Still, nothing can be done about that now. More important things require action . . .

VI

THE first news that you are succeeding comes through on the ticker tape you've had installed. The mines on Venus are at a standstill. This is quickly followed by frantic hysteria among the farmers. Silver, copper, oats and wheat are all in the bag. You go on to other commodities.

The brokers on the other end of your phone try to stay unemotional as you clip out orders. "Buy everything! Industrials, oils, entertainment, shipping. Pay special attention to stuff that hasn't moved for days. Buy enough to get people talking. If anyone gets sticky, offer ten points over listing."

You wait a few minutes, watching the ticker splutter out its messages, trying to keep up with the changes you are causing. You are spending millions, all that the dead man had and more. You can guess that never before has so much money moved among the stocks in such a short time.

Then you pick up the phone again. "Sell out! Completely! I don't want to retain a thing. Let it go for whatever you can get."

Once again you go back to the ticker. The confusing reversal is already coming over. Your brokers are certainly efficient. And that's just the way you want it. A little more of this and there won't be any faith left in the Solar System.

It's remarkable, you think, that these humans could build up a civilization based on such arbitrary values. One man with enough money at his command can distort the values of everything. He can raise the price of trivial things until even a king can't buy a pair of shoes. Or he can give away so much gold that a beggar would stagger under the weight of a throw-away gift.

And such people have all the resources of nine planets to play with . . .

There never was any doubt in your mind that the analogy you gave the dead man—the analogy of the cattle—was a true one. And you are even more certain now that your own race should have the benefits of the solar planets. They are being wasted, thrown away on a race of irrational, prejudiced, muddled-thinking creatures.

Your own race is entirely justified in wiping the universe clean of humans, to give more space to people with values that do not change; values that are basic and independent of commercial exploitation. The human mental dwarfs must be displaced by people who have something more than brute desires and ambitions; by people who are in touch with the Infinite, with Truth and Beauty and Goodness and Understanding.

You call into the phone again. "Start buying it all back. How much credit have I got?" The brokers give you a figure that you can imagine is staggering to mere humans, though it means little to your own non-mercenary mind. "All right. That should take us a long way. Make them sell. Offer anything up to a hundred points over the list. Cover every commodity there is. Stack them up! Make 'em groan!"

A chime sings out at the front door. That will be the paper, you think. You go and collect it. The headlines are more or less as you

expected, except that there is more emphasis on the possibility of war than you had bargained for.

The paper quickly runs over the crazy things that have been happening on the market, pointing out that the brokers concerned will not divulge the identity of the financier, then archly indicating that there can't be more than one or two men with enough money to start investing on such a scale. The finger points to you—or rather, to the dead man whose body you occupy. But there's no proof and that's all that matters. By the time proof is forthcoming you will have done irreparable damage.

War, says the paper, will be inevitable unless there is some change in the situation. Already things are happening that could easily be called aggressive—just so long as the injured party is in the right mood.

And that's another thing about humanity that makes you sure your race is doing the right thing. Faced with an economic collapse, they lose whatever veneer of civilization that normally clothes them and begin to plan wars. Instead of tracking the cause of the crisis to its heart and sinew, instead of using their self-proclaimed intelligence to discover the basic anomalies in their economic system, they go ahead with one branch of the system and try to recoup losses by building battleships and sinking them.

The fact that millions of lives are lost in the process does not matter—just so long as the books balance, just so long as the old false values are maintained.

Oh, humanity, humanity! you think. Humans have so much and yet so little!

Back on the phone, you order the brokers to sell. You tell them to give it away if necessary. The recent buying sent values soaring. Now they'll sink again—to rock bottom. Nothing will be worth anything any more—to humans. There'll be nothing in which to believe, nothing to work for. Those who try to start a war might even find that the masses don't think there is anything to fight for.

That will depend—not on the facts, but on the strength of the propaganda. It doesn't have to be true, just so long as it is said loud enough and long enough in the right emotional words.

From what you've read in the books on the ship that got lost, you can imagine the kind of words. Freedom must be fought for. For the sake of the future. Remember you are terrestrial. Remember you are Martian. Remember you are Venusian. Just because we came from

Earth hundreds of years ago doesn't mean we owe Earth allegiance. Earth wants to take away our freedom—fight for it! The Venusians forget they started on Earth. We must make them remember—*make* them!

And no doubt, you think, each faction will pray—to the same god. They will call on God's help because *they* are right, because only *they* are entitled to divine protection.

You begin to feel a tired, sick irritation with the human race. There is nothing similar among your own race, so you do not know what you want to do with them. The dead man's memories make you think that they ought to be shaken and shaken until some sense is knocked into their heads. But your own mind, your own memories know that that would do nothing. There is nothing to be done—except to exterminate them. To rid the universe of such selfish, savage, hypocritical morons.

Another paper comes—a special edition. There is no doubt now that war will come. It may even be here by the time the paper reaches you, says the editor. Someone is responsible, says the editor, someone has deliberately caused this situation by manipulating the stock market. And that someone must be discovered and punished. Again the finger points at you. The editor demands that you be investigated and that if you are found to be responsible then you must be executed.

You fling the paper down in disgust, without reading the details of the financial hysteria that's sweeping the Solar Federation.

That editor's leader is typical. It represents the thoughts, the attitude of millions. A man must be responsible. Kill him, then we'll be all right. Don't bother to remedy the system that enables a man to do what he has done. Leave that intact for later tries. Just get the man. Just get some blood and everything will be all right!

You switch off the ticker. You don't need it any more. Your work is done. The Solar System is chaotic, ready for the plucking. All you need do now is communicate with those who are to come after you and tell them that the time is ripe.

Sinking into a chair, you begin to energize your mind to cover the vast distance to the stars where they are waiting. Your eyes are closed and you are just beginning to throw off the material shackles, when you hear the door open. You look up and see Marson Cade.

"Hullo," you say. "Come to investigate me?"

You notice that he carries a weapon that he keeps pointed at you.

The dead man's memories tell you that it can kill, fast but painfully.

"No," says Cade, and he looks singularly unworried and self-possessed. "I've done all that where you are concerned. Now all I have to do is kill you."

"So simple, so easy," you scorn. "Just pull the trigger and I'm dead." You decide—knowing the answer beforehand—to see whether this man has any idea at all of what he is doing. "And how will that help you? How will it help the world and the solar system? Whether you kill me or not, the Federation is finished. Don't you think you ought to find out why I did it? Why a man who has lived peacefully for more than half a lifetime should suddenly do a thing like this? And don't you think you should take a look at the system that gives me the chance to do it?"

Cade smiles, but it is not a pleasant smile. There is too much pain and shame in it. "We shall do some of those things. One good thing that has come out of your activities is that we shall overhaul our system of values. We might even start to think differently. Maybe we won't start any more wars, after what you have taught us. This may well be the beginning of a new era for humanity."

Melodrama, you think, they can't resist injecting melodrama into things. "That's if you get over the present situation," you say, still keeping up the pretence that you are the dead man. "There's going to be an all mighty crash!"

Cade shakes his head and smiles again. You get the first twinge of alarm. Surely he doesn't—

"There'll be no crash," Cade says. "Nothing has happened at all. We let you go on doing these things just to see what you were driving at. That ticker was fed directly from my office. Your brokers were a couple of my clerks. The newspapers were specially printed for you. We thought it was worth it."

"But—but how did you know I was going to do that?" you ask, and there is a most unpleasant twisting in your stomach.

"Even while the two of you were at the Interrogation Center, my men were rigging up microphones here. I heard everything that was said—including your plans for conquering Earth. I knew you killed him, but I didn't reveal my knowledge because I wanted to see what you would do. When you ordered a ticker I arranged the whole thing. I'm sorry, but the stocks are exactly as they were before you came."

"So you know I'm an alien," you say. There is a heaviness in your heart, the friable, sensitive heart of the dead man.

"Yes, I know that," Cade says. "And you must know that you will have to die."

"Yes. Yes, I see that. But others will come. Others will not be deceived so easily."

"We shall be ready for them," Cade asserts. "You have taught us a great deal. More than you know. Your race would have to try something very different next time."

You feel that even now there might be a way of escape. If you can just keep him talking until you can change back into your native form, his weapon will not be able to hurt you. You start to concentrate.

But he must see you doing it, for his weapon moves slightly and he stops speaking. He must be seeing the change in your tissue, the gradual dissolving into vapor. You try harder, concentrate more.

And then you see his finger move.

And then—

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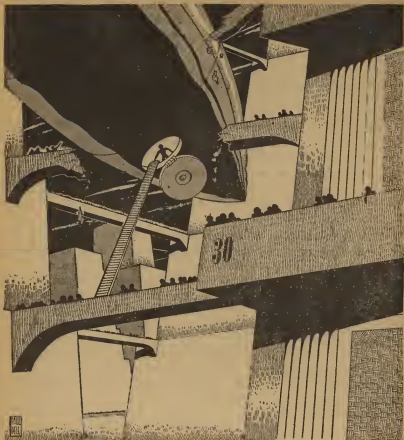
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THE city was a thing of growth gone mad. It had its Beauty, but it was a massive, balanced sort of beauty owing more to geometry than to art. Its buildings were mounting, block-wide piles of metal and masonry and warm, clear crystal in rainbow colored fusion, towering above the streets in setback terraces like the walls of chasms. Each terrace was a thoroughfare linked by long ramps with the one above and the one below, and crossways looped from terrace to terrace at every level, lacing the city with a lattice of steel. Terraces, streets, crossways, ramps all bore their fractions of the mill of traffic swirling from the highest rooftop to the street and far out of sight below ground. Leagues overhead the streets were echoed in a net of sky from which the city caught light; shone in it, intensified it, sent it down from level to level to the streets' deepest reaches.

Handler was off duty. Sturdy and squat and built for lifting, he lumbered along in the crowd on a thirtieth level crossway, moving with the slow shuffle characteristic of his caste.

Just past the center of its span Arsman idled near the edge of the crossway out of the press, intent upon the boil of movement below. Handler angled across traffic to Arsman's side. They stood in silence for awhile, like spiders on a thread of web spun from face to face of a crevasse in a cliff, unmindful of the never resting wind of the higher levels thrumming the metal surface beneath them, oblivious to the ceaseless passing and repassing behind them.

When at last they spoke, inevitably their theme was the



preëminence of man. It was the fundamental concept of their civilization. For thirty centuries no other had engaged more of their thoughts and speculations. Whole schools of thought had been founded upon it; had risen and fallen and fought and debated and disputed, split and reunited over it. Not over the fact of it; that had never been challenged. Rather over interpretations of it.

Handler and Arsman did not argue. Their minds moved in identical patterns, and theirs was a communion of beautiful accord. What they said was like an antiphonal repetition of the responses of a well remembered ritual.

"Man is the flame in darkness," Arsman chanted. "Man is the bearer of torches, the lighter of shadowed ways."

"Man is the dreamer," Handler responded. "Man is the builder."

Picket was the thirtieth level block patrol guard on duty at the crossway approach. He saw Arsman and Handler meet. When they began their chant he spoke sharply into the closed beam of Control.

"Station fifty-two, level thirty. Picket calling A."

"Control A. What's your trouble, Picket?"

"Same old thing. A couple of them are at it again on my crossway. Right in the middle, as usual."

"All right. Hold on and we'll shoot over some specials."

"Just so they get here before things start cubing up. The whole force won't help any then. Remember what happened on the sixtieth. Fifty-two thirty, Picket out."

Picket had reason to worry. Already off-duty idlers were closing up on Arsman and Handler, attracted by their counter-punctual harangue. More were drifting up the crossway approaches. The normal traffic of the crossway was slowing noticeably. Crossways were designed to support triple their normal load, but Picket had seen them collapse before in these same circumstances. When one of these love feasts really got under way there was no telling where it would end.

"Man is the child of the universe; man is its master," boomed Handler, picking up the tempo.

"Man *is* the universe. The universe is man!" Arsman roared.

"Man is heir to the stars!"

"Man is lord of space!"

The words resounded the length and breath of the street. Arsman and Handler were adapting their communicators as amplifiers. Picket fumed. He could not leave his station before the specials came. Yet if someone didn't soon get out in that crowd it would be eternally too late. As long as they remained a passive audience they could be managed. Once they joined in the responses the job would be almost impossible. Since the superiority of man was the one unquestioned truth of civilization, no one could deny them the right to proclaim it.

"Fifty-two thirty. Picket calling A. What's the matter with those specials?"

"Control A. They're on their way."

"They better be! If you don't get a move on you'll have to shut down the street."

Even as Picket spoke mobile special units flashed up ramps on each side of the street and along the level thirty terraces, ultrasonics at full pitch, stimulators directed ahead to clear the way, depressors laterally to keep it clear. They swung to a halt blocking the crossway approaches. They were too late.

"Stand by A," Picket barked over the Control beam. "Stand by!"

"Man is the spirit!"

"MAN!"

"The spirit is man!"

"MAN!"

Some of the listening throng took up the refrain. In another moment they were in full chorus. They began to surge in unison with every shout, edging into an hysteria of emotional catharsis. The crossway swung, gathering momentum with each impulse until it was whipping like a towline in a full gale at sea. Traffic was starting to mill on crossways at three other levels.

Now that the crisis was at hand Picket spoke to Control quietly.

"All right A. It's going into emergency. Block alarm! Block alarm!"

Gongs sounded deeply through amplifiers all up and down the street. Special units flashed out of nowhere, blocking ramps and crossways and clamping isolation on the block. Metal sheets sighed down to cover every opening in the buildings.

"How does it look?" Control demanded.

"How does it look?" Picket echoed. "It looks like a bitch kitty! You'd better give them the works."

"MAN IS TRUTH!"

The full throated words thundered and rolled and crashed high and low, near and far the length of the street.

"MAN IS LIFE! MAN IS EARTH! MAN IS HEAVEN!"

The rest was lost in interference howls as Control cut in the main suppressors. Picket hastily adjusted his dampers. At the same moment maintenance units swarmed out along the catwalks running bolster cables beneath the crossways. The pandemonium crescendoed while a man might have counted twenty slowly, until the bedrock stirred and buildings throbbed.

Eerily, faintly, a deep rising tone whispered out of the high sky; rose and lifted to a tearing scream that overrode all other sound.

Unthinkably far above a flame splinter winked. Like a dart of light a red-glowing ship crashed into the atmosphere at frantic speed; down, down into the gape of the street until its shadow flitted over the multitude.

Still it plummeted irresistibly on, tearing into the city, snapping crossways like oatstraws. Picket activated the city-wide alarm. Again the vibrant tendrils of brazen gong strokes probed the air. Sound and movement went out of the street together like the snuffed flame of a candle.

Only the falling ship continued its thundering, ripping descent. Down and down it fell leaving a yawning, ragged-rimmed tunnel swept clear from the sky to mark its passing. But it was slowing, the very violence of its own titanic impact dissipating its tremendous inertial energy.

At the twenty-first level the taper of the buildings no longer gave the gorge of the street the width to accommodate the ship's bulk. The terraces caught it, but it plowed on into metal and solid masonry. At last it rested, its shadow blanketing the group on Picket's crossway and darkening the street for rods around. Handler and Arsman were just beneath its hull, their paean to the perfection of man forgotten.

Slowly, slowly, like a frozen river thawing, the street came back to life. At the higher levels maintenance units began rerigging broken crossways. Debris vanished from the terraces under the deft scrapers of the disposal units. Obeying a compulsion beyond even the tremendous wonder of the alien ship's advent, traffic moved again in a quickening tempo over and around and under the titanic intruder.

Only in the immediate vicinity of the wreck at levels from twenty-five to thirty-five there was no change beyond an inch by inch convergence upon the ship. In its shadow Arsman and Handler were swallowed up among the multitude closing around them.

"Fifty-two thirty, report please. Fifty-five thirty, report—forty-eight thirty-one—fifty thirty-four—forty-six thirty-nine—report—report."

Control called its guards at the various levels in the affected area, but for once they were beyond the constraint of duty.

The hulk lay deathly still now, canted slightly in its bed of wreckage. Its metallic shell glowed dully, scorched and etched with a record of its adventures, snapping and sighing as it cooled over the

rising normal tumult of the street. For long minutes it lay as it had fallen, the focus of an ever-growing crowd creeping steadily near it against the efforts of guards recalled at last to their charge. Picket had given over his station to one of the specials and was battling in the thick of it, where he should be.

Handler and Arsman were holding their own against their encroaching fellows. Still from their point of vantage they stared up awed and unmoving at the vast hulk slanting directly over them. It hung so near they could make out its every detail.

While they gazed, low in the side of the hulk turned toward them a convex disk began noiselessly to spin. Out and out it wound its massive, glistening screw until at last it came free and lurched aside on giant arms. A ramp, tiny by comparison with the bulk from which it emerged, slid into view and dropped down groping for the terrace edge. A long, deep murmur sighed up from the watchers.

Something stirred in the dimness of the lock, and then flopped, shapeless and suety, into sight. It was a horror beyond horror. It was dwarfish and pulpy and pale and misshapen. Its skin seemed to be limp and flaccid and a clash of colors. Two of its malformed legs hung down slackly; two others fumbled grotesquely for footing on the ramp.

It was terrible to see a thing which should have crawled on all fours standing on two legs. Even caged apes in the giant zoo of the three hundredth—the ground—level were more bearable. At least they hid some of their unsightliness with hair.

Hate and revulsion welled up in Arsman. Somewhere deep within him a long disused mental door creaked open. A dormant pattern of conditioning that had somehow survived in him through uncounted generations leaped from it.

"It is a space thing!" he clarified.

Then he did a thing he had not known he could do. He sucked up the great power beam, funneling it into a thread of intolerable energy for a weapon he had not known he possessed. A pencil of whiteness whipped out from it flicking at the alien. The thing boiled and shrivelled and whimpered a terrible, fleeting cry. It fell and rolled to the foot of the ramp like a bag of scorched oily rags.

Arsman played his blast up the side of the hulk, diffusing it just inside the lock in a way he knew instinctively—although he did not know how he knew it—would permeate every square foot of the ship's interior.

Picket called up all his reserves of strength to beat through the throng.

"All right!" he bellowed. "You've done it now. You're under arrest, Arsman. You too, Handler," he added a bit unreasonably. "It was you started all this."

He turned and went back toward the crossway approach, Handler and Arsman following docilely. At his station he stopped and beamed Control.

"Report at once!" the order snapped out at Picket as soon as he cut the beam.

"The hell with it!" Picket grated. "Send me a vet. I think these fools have killed them all."

"All what?" came back the startled question.

"All the space things."

"Space things?" Control repeated doubtfully. "Look here, Picket, what's going on down there anyway? We're all in the dark. We haven't had an understandable report in the last half hour."

"I'll get the special to fill you in. Right now I want that medman and I want him fast!"

"Just as you say. But remember, there's bound to be an inquiry over this, and you'll be the one to suffer if you can't justify your actions to Central."

"I'll risk it. Just get that vet on his way!"

"We started a unit off a minute ago. They should be there by now. Well, it's your funeral! Control A out!"

Even as Picket cut out of the beam a med unit came up at speed. From his insignia Picket identified the first of them to reach him as one of the city's few remaining original medmen, which meant he was not only senior in the Veterinary Service but also that he was, in the days when they had such things, a physician. Plainly Control was taking a more serious view of the episode than they admitted. Senior medmen were subject to call only in the gravest emergencies.

"This way, sir."

The crowd opened respectfully for the incredibly ancient senior as he hurried toward the ship ahead of Picket.

"Whatever you've got here," he stated ominously, "it had better be good."

"I think it'll do, sir," said Picket drily. "Here's the first of them."

Muttering illnaturedly to himself, the vet bent over the crumpled thing at the foot of the ramp. After a moment his complaint trailed

off into an exclamation of surprise and interest. He continued his examination in silence for a long time then, and when he straightened from it, it was with a palpable aura of excitement.

"You say there are more of these?" he demanded eagerly.

"I don't know, sir. But I think there must be. One of them could hardly have managed that machine alone."

"I dare say you are right," the medman agreed. "You there! Tracker!" he beckoned to the smallest onlooker in the front rank of the crowd. "Come here and see if you can make it up this ramp. Yes, you!"

As Tracker came forward rather undecidedly, the old medman bounced up to him and took hold of him.

"Come on! Come on," he ordered, hurrying Tracker impatiently. "I haven't got all day!"

Tracker started up the ramp gingerly. It was all he could do to climb it in spite of his slight stature. The ramp was narrow for him and frail even for his small bulk. The lock at the top was scarcely wide enough to let him pass.

There was a curiously still interval; then Tracker reappeared in the opening carrying another of the space things. He tipped forward cautiously letting the limp alien topple out so that it slid on down the ramp. The medman pounced eagerly.

One by one Tracker emptied the ship of its crew. The medmen laid them out in a row across the little space left clear by the instinctive recoil of the bystanders until there were nineteen of them. The senior moved about uneasily—almost distractedly—from one to another of them, continuing an increasingly querulous soliloquy of which only occasional exclamations of "incredible" or "unbelievable" rose into intelligibility.

Ultimately Tracker came to the lock empty-handed. He bent out and peered down.

"That's the lot," he announced, and began carefully edging back to the terrace.

The medman stopped his pacing at once.

"Pack them up," he commanded his assistants preëemptorily. "We must have them where we can give them a real examination."

He turned and retreated along the crossway much less slowly even than he had come. Picket hurried after him. This was the biggest adventure Picket had ever had. He had no intention of relinquishing it now. When they reached his station he stopped.

"Just a minute, sir," he requested respectfully.

"What is it now?" the medman demanded irascibly.

"I'll have to go along with you, sir."

"Eh? Go with me!"

"Yes, sir. It's regulations, sir."

That was sheer bluff. The situation could not be considered covered by the remotest extension of the Code, but Picket had a shrewd notion the vet knew as little about codes as Picket himself knew about medicine. He was right.

"Well," the senior conceded, fuming visibly at the prospect, "if you must, I suppose you must. But be quick!"

"Take over here until I get back," Picket ordered the special at his station. He considered Arsman and Handler thoughtfully. "You two had better come along," he decided. "I don't want you getting mislaid. All right, sir. Let's go."

The room under the vast floor area of the zoo was itself lofty and spacious, but it seemed crowded to Picket. He was uneasy in the great light beating into every corner of it from the floods far up against the ceiling. There was a smell to the place he did not care for, and machines scattered about it he distrusted. He was wondering if his coming there were such a happy idea after all.

The alien things from the wreck were laid out on a long stone table down the middle of the room. They had lost none of their repellency in death. They were even less attractive than they had been alive, particularly now that the vets had cut and removed what Picket had taken for their skin, but what now appeared to be some sort of limp artificial casing, laying bare their true hairless, grayish pallidity. Picket and his prisoners huddled away from the table, standing stiffly together for mutual reassurance.

As he and his brace of assistants worked, the senior medman delivered a running commentary on the bodies, part analysis, part instructions to his aides.

"Yes, definitely animal life forms. Organic, you observe. Heart—four chambers. Lungs, veins, arteries—air breathers of one sort or other, I believe. Look at that spine! Erect bipeds—not naturally but evolved. Muscle, nerve, cartilage, adipose tissue. Surely I have worked with things very like these before. Ah—give me that! The brain. Now we shall get at it. Hmm—"

His dissertation trailed off into an increasingly concerned mutter. Layer by layer he stripped the bodies, testing their fabric, absorbing

their pattern, correlating it against half-forgotten standards dredged painfully up from a dim, disused corner in his memory of a time long gone by.

He worked ever more slowly and carefully; returned again and again to verify his findings. His assistants caught his mood, tightening with his uncertainty sympathetically. Something of it touched even Arsman and Handler and Picket. They stood awkwardly, a little apart, following with a sort of fascinated revolt every deft movement of the three vets as they stooped at the table, cutting and delving and slicing with their probes and scalpels.

"Good Lord!"

The senior medman's exclamation had the impact of a bursting grenade. The little group in the examination room were shocked into utter stillness. They stared at him unmoving, while he stared down at the half-dismantled thing beneath his instruments. At last he straightened and turned. For the first time it seemed to Picket that the old Medman's movements betrayed the wear of all his centuries of being.

"These are not space things," his monotonous voice was subtly awed and shaken. "These are men!"

Men!

Picket recoiled from the examination table, his rollers burring abruptly on the metal floor. Arsman shifted his armored hulk uncertainly from track to track. Handler shuffled his traction plates, producing a sibilant, sliding noise. White and amber lights alternated behind the vents of the medman's turreted brain.

They were the same company still, but each had withdrawn into himself, groping for reassurance in the chaos of his world tottering on its foundations—every ineradicably instilled instinct of his conditioning, the very fundamental principle of his existence crying out in horrified guilt against the blasphemous enormity of the thing which they had done.

Men!

They had slain their creators.

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QUIZ KID

By E. EVERETT EVANS

Q His acts were those of a superman, but his father couldn't understand how he did them, until it was too late.

ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL BLAISDELL

JIM FERGUSON, Second Vice President of the National Bank of Washington, D. C., turned on his desk radio for the afternoon news. As the tubes warmed up he could hear the voice of the newscaster, apparently more excited than usual.

"... surprise move, Admiral Harry Ferguson, of the International Peace Fleet has just announced a new form of World Government. With his heavily bomb-laden planes patrolling the skies above all the principal cities in the world, he has proclaimed himself Dictator of the World."

The eyes of the hearer, which had at first showed astonishment, then disbelief, closed with a spasm of pain, as Jim Ferguson snapped off the radio and buried his head in his arms, crossed before him on the desk.

"Is this the end toward which all these things have been aimed?" he asked himself. Those terribly puzzling events which had so distressed him for so many years!

He could remember so distinctly the first time he had noticed anything out of the ordinary. It was late one afternoon, when he had come home from work.

Angela, his wife, was sitting and staring intently out of an open window. Glancing over her shoulder, Jim had seen some twenty-odd boys, ranging in age from about eight up to fifteen or sixteen, sitting in concentric half-circles on the lawn. Facing them was his eight-year old son, Harry, standing firmly on spraddled, roly-poly legs.



The boy's hair was mussed, as usual; a streak of dirt ran slantwise across his face, and his somewhat grimy hands were gesticulating sharply. Jim could see that he was addressing this little group, evidently with authority, as they were paying rapt attention to his words.

"Hi, Darling, what goes?"

Angela glanced up with a frown of annoyance, but changed it immediately to a smile of greeting. She turned back and called through the window. "You'll have to break it up now, Harry. Daddy's home for dinner."

She rose then, and responded warmly to his kiss. "It's all very amusing," she said. "Harry seems to have become the undisputed boss of the boys of the town, and they're going in for politics."

"Huh?" he demanded in astonishment. Then his face cleared and he laughed. "Oh, you mean some sort of school politics."

"I do not," she returned. "I mean real, grown-up politics. This town is a political mess. The boys don't like it, and they intend to change it."

And change conditions—and office-holders—the kids did. Jim

never did find out all they accomplished, nor how it was done. He did manage to learn that they did a lot of house-to-house canvassing. That they talked to people everywhere. That they actually helped to formulate public opinion.

"I tell you, Jim, the arguments those boys are talking-up about candidates and policies are not kid stuff," the president of the bank stopped at Jim's cage to say. "They are the most serious, logical, point-making, unanswerable statements of fact and truth that I've ever heard in a political campaign. They've opened my eyes."

The town really woke up when the boys presented facts to prove that certain men in office had been stuffing their mattresses with plenty of hay from certain grafts. Jim was again surprised to learn that his Harry had supplied most of these facts, as well as leads by which other boys had ferretted out further information.

The adult politicians had looked very much amused when the kids first started their activities. But soon they stopped smiling. Laughter became foreign to some of them. Those who were backing good candidates and platforms received approval and assistance. Those who were behind shady candidates, who were looking forward to some more easy "gravy" and greater political power, became actually frightened.

Jim rushed home early one afternoon when he heard a rumor that Harry had been injured. But Angela met him at the door, calm and smiling.

"A couple of hoodlums, hired by Boss Dolliver, did try to hurt Harry and a couple of other boys," she explained. "But they were caught before any harm was done, and are now in jail, along with Dolliver."

"This foolishness has got to stop," Jim demanded hotly. "I won't have him in danger that way. It's all a lot of hooey, anyway, kids mixing up in politics. Let 'em play kid games."

"They aren't in any danger; it isn't hooey, and they won't stop," Angela informed him, levelly. "Everything is under control now, and will stay that way. And with election only two weeks away, they have to keep at it, or all that they've done so far will come undone."

Jim had subsided, as he usually did, and let it go at that. He was an easy-going sort of chap. Not stupid, and not lacking in aggressiveness when he considered it worthwhile. But he did very much dislike scenes, and he knew from experience just how easy it was

to start an argument with his wife, who didn't seem to have his self-control during a discussion.

Yes, Jim mused, that was when it had first started. Harry had continued his "political career" all through boyhood, in spite of his father's objections. He had had his mother's support; he seemed to be more intimate with her than he was with his father.

Not that he and Harry didn't get along together. They *liked* to be with each other. Harry was never disrespectful; never out and out disobedient. He always seemed a bit perplexed or sorry that he could not talk freely with his Dad about the things he was doing. They'd talk on any and all other subjects. But not about "what," "why," or "how" he was working politically.

"I just can't understand how the boy can do all he does," Jim often thought. "Why, a man forty or fifty would be proud to possess such political acumen or strategic ability as the kid did even before he was in his 'teens.'"

Harry "got by" in school. That was about all that could be said, according to his report cards. Nothing exceptional about his marks. Not any better, if as good, than Jim's boyhood grades had been. Certainly not the all-A record which Angela had made all through school. Yet on radio quiz programs, on which he was so often invited to participate, Harry could answer every question, no matter the subject or how hard.

"Maybe I ought to have talked more with Angela about those things which worried me," Jim thought. But somehow, he had never been able to bring himself to the point. He had known with certainty that she would gently ridicule him for feeling that the boy felt more affection for her than for his father. And probably would have made Jim feel silly for not recognizing that his son was a genius in statesmanship.

"I've always known Angela was a very ambitious woman. I can't help remembering how she tried to force me to use methods that I didn't like, to get ahead at the bank. She'd never mind that a few people got their corns trod on, if it helped me get above them. But I'm not built that way."

He didn't like to think deeply about it, even to himself, but Jim knew that he had a very high sense of ethics, and of duty to his Brother Man. He had resisted Angela's insistence, even though it almost resulted in a split with this beautiful woman whom he loved so very much. But at last she had seemed to understand; they had

patched things up, and she had been very loving and sweet ever since.

He could see how she might very well have transferred her aims from him to Harry, and was now using the boy as the focus and means to further her vaulting ambition.

Jim realized that these deep and continual broodings had made him moody and apathetic as the years passed. It had taken sheer force of will during the days to keep up with his business life, and even to forge ahead. But he had gone from cash boy to teller of the bank in the ten years following high school, and now held an even higher position.

But the evenings . . . and the nights!

His memory jumped ahead now to that incident when Harry was about twelve. He was a gangling boy then, growing faster than his clothes. Angela had taken him to the State Capitol one day to watch the legislature in action. Said he should learn something about how State laws were made.

That day they had been voting on a bill to increase quite materially the appropriation for children's playgrounds throughout the state. The newspapers, even those who favored the bill as well as those opposed, had seemed to feel that it would fail.

Before the session convened, young Harry had slipped into the cloakroom. There he had talked earnestly to a number of members who had announced that they were against the bill. To everyone's surprise, enough of them changed their vote so that the bill passed.

Harry had been given enough publicity since he first began his political maneuverings so that this did not go unnoted by the alert reporters. He was again "played up" in the press, and this was hailed as but another of the astonishing victories of this "Boy Statesman."

In response to Jim's questionings that evening, Harry had merely said, "Well, heck, Dad, the kids need those playgrounds. There's none in so many small towns, not enough in the cities. Kids oughtn't to play in the streets—you've told me that often enough."

"Yes," Jim had persisted. "But why did you feel that *you* had to interfere?"

The boy had shrugged. "Well, gee gosh, somebody had to. The bill wasn't gonna pass. I just talked to some of 'em, and they voted for it."

Nor would Harry discuss it further, to Jim's annoyance. "Now

how on earth could a kid his age force mature men of that calibre to change their minds, or at least their votes," he had pondered—to no avail. The question simply would not answer itself, then nor during the years that followed.

Jim started up in surprise when the lights in his office flashed on. The watchman standing in the doorway, was as surprised as he.

"Good heavens, Mr. Ferguson, sir. Are you sick?"

Jim shook his head, and slowly arose. "It is time to go home, Bill?" he asked, dazedly.

"Why, Mr. Ferguson, sir, it's almost midnight. I thought you'd be out celebrating your son's victory." Jim winced, but silently got his hat and coat and almost staggered out the bank door when the watchman opened it for him.

The house was dark when he got there. Evidently Angela was with Harry. "She's always with him—or he with her," the thought was a pain in his heart. "Always keeping him away from me. Always egging him on to get ahead. Well, she ought to be happy now. How can anyone get higher? Or," mirroring his own feelings about the coup, "how can anyone go lower!"

He let himself into the house with his key. As he was hanging up his things, he noticed the fishing rods leaning against the closet wall. Slumping wearily into the nearest chair, those rods reminded him that he and the boy had had many fine times together. They both loved to fish, and did it often. He recalled one such day with unusual clarity.

He had come home one warm, summer Saturday noon, to find Harry slouched in a big chair, reading.

"Mom's gone to one of her kaffee-klatsches," he announced. "Guess she's got a big scrap on. Said some of the old hens were agin one of her pet ideas. Grub's on the board, though."

They ate their lunch, then Jim asked, "How about a bit of fishing, Harry?"

His strapping, seventeen-year-old son was agreeable. Once out in the rowboat on the little near-by lake, hooks baited and in the water, they relaxed in comfort and old clothes. After some time, when bites were not too frequent to impede conversation, Jim drew a magazine from his pocket and held it up.

"Have you seen this article in *Politics* about you, son?"

"'Bout me? Nope. What's it?"

"The writer reviews your 'amazing career'—his words—and goes into suppositions regarding whether or not you may be a mutant, or a *homo superior*."

Harry looked up and snorted. "Me a Superman? That's a giggle!"

"No, he's really serious about it. Says the world is used to child prodigies in music and mathematics, but not in politics, which is, essentially, a process of changing or making up other people's minds for them. He says here," Jim read from the opened magazine, "'It is not too fantastic, we believe, to suggest that this young man has a type of mind which the world has never before, or perhaps but rarely, seen. The writers of Fantasy literature have long predicted that the day would come when a *homo superior* would appear on Earth, who would have as one of his attributes the ability to superimpose his mind on that of others. That he would be able to make others do his bidding; to suggest thoughts, desires and actions to them via telepathy, direct mental control, or some other form of mental gymnastic beyond the powers of the ordinary human to conceive.'"

He stopped reading as Harry grunted loudly again in derision. Jim looked at his son a long moment, with a careful scrutiny which the other bore without other sign than a grin.

"The writer goes on," Jim turned to the magazine again, "'Such a superior person would be able to force his own plans by taking over control of the minds of certain key men or women, and making them do whatever he wished. He would also have the power to read the minds of others, and thus learn secrets which they were carefully keeping locked up in the fastnesses of their innermost consciousness.'"

"Aw, the guy's nuts!"

"This might explain," Jim was still reading, "'the extraordinary events which have marked the career of this Wonder Boy. It would explain how he has been able to expose secret crimes and shady dealings of certain ex-politicians. It would explain how a youngster not yet in his 'teens could change the minds of City Councilmen and State Legislators so that they would vote exactly opposite to the way they had stated they would, on certain measures, as has apparently been done a number of times since this youthful Machiavelli started his career.'"

"Machia . . . who's he?" Harry interrupted.

Jim looked up in surprise. "Why, you answered that very ques-

tion several years ago on a radio quiz. Told all about him, dates of birth and death, what he did and wrote."

"Did I?" Harry answered nonchalantly. "I musta forgot, then."

Jim leaned forward very earnestly, neglecting to watch his line, forgetful even of the fact that he was fishing.

"That's one of the things that perplex and frighten me about you, son. You're so bright at times, so mature, with flashes almost of genius. Yet at other times your mind seems so very ordinary, so . . . almost stupid. How do you account for it?"

The young man's face suddenly darkened with a frown of concentration. Slowly the words came, almost as if he was forcing them out past a censoring wall. "I . . . don't . . . know, Dad. I just don't *know!*"

There was silence for several minutes. Neither noticed that both bobbers were under water, and the lines taut. Finally Harry leaned forward, rested his hand on his father's knee.

"Dad, I love you very much. You're so darned swell! But there's something . . . I don't . . . somehow, I never *can* talk to you as I'd like . . . I've *never* been able . . . to talk freely to you . . . I don't know why . . . and I don't like it."

He leaned back, still frowning, his mind clearly troubled. Jim's heart had leaped at this avowal of his son's love, but only for a moment. He, too, was greatly troubled in spirit.

Suddenly Harry laughed, his face clearing to its usual boyish charm. "But I can tell you one thing, Dad. I'm no Sup—Hey, your bobber's down!"

Jim snapped out of it and looked up. "So's yours!"

They had pulled in two more fish for their catch, and the subject was not resumed between them then . . . or ever.

And that night, as Jim had lain sleepless, this answerless question bubbling and seething within him as it always was, a thought came starkly into his mind, that he was being very silly about the whole matter, that there was no problem, that he should quit thinking about it, and go to sleep.

He did.

Jim Ferguson sighed, there in the lonely house. There were so many angles to this puzzling thing that had so enchained his mind all those long, weary years, that seemed clamoring for re-attention on this night of sorrow and disappointment.

There was that bewildering letter, with its offer of a new and

bigger job, which had come at such a time that either coincidence was being stretched all out of kilter, or there was some magic behind it. It had come a few weeks before the election of Harry as Congressman, just as he reached the required legal age of twenty-five. That letter from the bank here in Washington, offering a vice presidency—to him, a small-town bank teller.

Yes, they had all come to Washington, to live together. Harry was then a tall, serious-faced young man, weighing close to two hundred pounds. His dark-brown hair was still wavy, and his brown, wide-spaced eyes were so like Angela's as to be startling. Jim recalled how vain Harry was of his newly-sprouted, small, silky mustache.

Once in Washington, Harry had soon become a power in the House of Representatives. Paying no attention to the usual custom that first-term Congressmen should be barely visible but never audible, he had plunged full-strength unto law-making. He wangled membership on two important committees, and introduced several bills.

He had continued growing in power and importance during his second and the first part of his third terms. Then had come that interview with the President.

Harry had phoned one afternoon that he had a seven o'clock appointment with the President. Angela had asked, "Harry, do you suppose you could arrange for your Dad and me to meet him? We never have, you know."

He had chuckled at that, Angela told Jim when reporting this conversation to him, and had said, "I'll see if I can fix it for you, Mom."

Thus, when he arrived at the house that evening, Harry had informed his parents that they were to go with him to the White House. "You'll only get to shake hands and say 'Hello.'"

"That's all right, dear. I've so wanted to meet President Williams," his mother said. Jim also expressed his appreciation of the honor.

"So very glad to meet you both," the President had said, when they did meet him an hour or so later. "You really have a very exceptional son. We expect great things of him."

"We think he is pretty nice, too," Angela had smiled, and Jim remembered that he had straightened proudly.

They had chatted a moment longer, and then, just as he was turning away, the President stopped, hesitated, and came back.

"Just a moment. Let me think . . . I called Harry here tonight to

talk about this new Education Bill. But an idea just came into my mind . . . This is strictly confidential, but I'm going to have to replace our Chief Delegate to the United Nations Organization . . . Ferguson, would you be willing to resign your seat in Congress, if I appoint you to that position?"

Harry had gulped, glanced at his parents, then back to stare in undisguised amazement at the President. "Would . . . would I? Naturally, sir, I'd be glad and proud to accept such an honor."

Jim Ferguson must have dozed a bit then, for the next thing he knew he heard the breakfast chimes. Mechanically he arose and went to the table. The maid noticed that he ate nothing, and only sipped his coffee, staring unceasingly into space. He looked so haggard and worn she finally asked if he were ill.

He glanced up, assayed a smile, and said, "No, just thinking." He went into the other room and sank into a chair. Waves of memory washed over the beach of his mind once more, memory of what seemed, to him, the most amazing of all Harry's astounding victories.

It was just about a year after the young man had taken up his duties in the U. N. that Harry had presented a complete plan for the formation of an International Police Force, and had succeeded, after much argument and debate, in having it unanimously accepted by the entire world. The Soviet bloc had tried to stop it, of course. But Harry Ferguson had met their top men, and they finally gave in. Jim and Angela had been with their son at that historic meeting.

Incredible, yet it was true. The International Peace Fleet was formed, and when it was functioning, the entire world disarmed. All armaments heavier than personal target and hunting guns, all war planes, ships of war, chemical and bacteriological war supplies, even the stored atomic bombs, were turned over to the I. P. F.

Members of that organization patrolled all countries. Its carefully selected personnel foreswore all allegiance to their country of birth, and became known as "Citizens of the World."

Harry Ferguson had, naturally, been chosen as the first admiral of the I. P. F., and had labored day and night to make it a solidified, smoothly-running machine for peace.

But now this latest coup. It outraged every sense in Jim Ferguson's loyal mind. For anything authoritarian was anathema to him. Thus his mind and soul were stretched tightly on the rack of torment and torture. He could not eat; he could not sleep. He sat in dumb

misery, sinking ever more deeply into a quagmire of fear, uncertainty and mental turmoil.

Then, the following evening, there was a great flurry of bellowing sirens—and Harry and Angela came home. They were, of course, accompanied by an armed body-guard, which took up stations all about the house and grounds.

Angela was visibly proud and delighted with the turn of events. Harry looked strained, pale, and very preoccupied. Jim stood aloof, silent, exhausted, dejected. He had aged terribly during those two wracking days and nights, but the others did not seem to notice.

As they were retiring for the night, Jim went to his son's bedroom. "This isn't right, Harry," he said slowly, and with an evident strain that brought a dew onto his forehead, and bloody flecks into his eyes. "Your taking this power just isn't right. The people should and must have the right to choose their own leaders, not have someone take that power by force. Up to now you've always said the same thing. But now you've gone powermad. You've got to be stopped."

There was the sound of crashing, echoing shots from a heavy target pistol, and the Dictator of the World fell.

Hardly had the last reverberations ceased when Angela, half-undressed, rushed into the room. Taking in the situation in one quick glance, she dropped beside the body of her beloved son, the casket of all her hopes and plans, and cradled his bloody head in her arms.

Jim Ferguson still stood there—stolid, dazed, benumbed, the gun still held in his limp dangling hand.

Then, breaking through the fog in his stupefied senses, Jim Ferguson heard, as clearly as though they had been shouted aloud, Angela's biting, accusing words, directly in his mind.

"You stupid idiot. Oh, you blundering, murderous fool. It is *I* who have the *power*. Harry has none of his own; he was merely the tool through which I worked, because I knew the world would not yet accept a woman ruler."

There was a moment of agonizing pain inside his skull, as though his very brain was being forcibly compressed and constricted by a tremendous *compulsion*. There were whirling, expanding globes and concentric circles of fiery, blinding light . . . that exploded into blackness.

Jim Ferguson and his son Harry were completely united at last.

¶ Man's creed: If it threatens you, kill it! had carried him from a fear-crazed animal crouching in a cave to the conquest of space. But in the steaming jungles of Venus he found that this was an

Unwanted Heritage

A NOVELET

By E. C. TUBB

ILLUSTRATED BY ROY HUNT

THEY were punishing a man that morning.

He stood facing the stockade, hands lashed to metal rings hammered into the raw wood above his head. His back was bare, sweat running in rivulets down the white skin, soaking into the khaki of his shorts. He looked sullen, defiantly staring at the exotic grain of the wood before his eyes.

Major Harrison planted stocky legs firmly on the soft loam of the compound, grasped both hands behind him, cleared his throat with a single harsh sound.

"Men," he snapped. "I regret the necessity for this punishment as much as you do, yet discipline must be maintained." He stared sharply at the assembled garrison, letting his narrowed eyes drift over the little group of civilian technicians standing to one side.

"Lassiter knew what he was doing. He knew the punishment for his crime. I had warned him. I have warned you all." Again his hooded eyes rested on the civilians. "Some of you may think the punishment too severe; I cannot agree. Any man who willingly associates with animals, must be expected to be treated like one."

The man lashed to the stockade stiffened, half turned his head, then shrugged and resumed his former position.

Harrison glanced at him. "What Lassiter did is known to you all. I shall not repeat it," contempt thickened his harsh tones. He nodded towards a sergeant. "Proceed!"

A medic stepped forward, his shirt dark with sweat, the blood-red



insignia of rank sewn to one sleeve. Rapidly he swabbed the naked back with antiseptic, stepped back. The sergeant reluctantly approached, swung the crude whip.

"One!" the thong slapped dully against the bare flesh.

"Two!" he muttered. "Three! Four!"

"Harder man," snapped Harrison. "Put some life into it. Remember why he's being punished. Strike harder!"

The sergeant bit his lip, made the lash whistle through the air.

"Seven! Eight! Nine!"

"Harder," grated Harrison. "Harder still!"

Beneath the cutting blows, a pattern of criss-cross welts grew. Crimson came to the pale skin, the long thin cuts oozing blood. Grimly, Lassiter bit his lips, the muscles of arms and shoulders standing out in sharp relief beneath the smooth white skin.

"Eighteen! Nineteen! Twenty!"

Thankfully the sergeant lowered the whip, wiped sweat from face and neck. Harrison grunted, nodded to the medic. He sprang forward, swabbed the wounds free of blood, sprayed on the collodion antiseptic.

Lassiter hadn't murmured during the flogging, but beneath the savage bite of the plastic dressing he whitened, strained madly at his bonds, then slumped in a dead faint. Phlegmatically the medic finished covering the wounds with the spray. Finally satisfied, he freed Lassiter's hands, supporting the sagging body against his own.

"Leave him," snapped Harrison.

"But the man is sick, sir," protested the medic.

"Leave him. When he recovers put him on normal duty. His pain may teach him that I mean what I say." For a moment Harrison teetered on the balls of his feet, hands clasped behind him, narrowed eyes darting along the ranks of the garrison. Abruptly he spun on his heel, strode away.

The medic watched him, his lips moving soundlessly. He glanced at the sergeant, shrugged, gently laid the unconscious man face down on the soft loam.

An officer bawled a sharp command. Two hundred men stiffened, jerked to attention, shouldered their arms. Further bawled orders. Like marionettes the ranked men split, swung into smooth motion, marched across the compound. The gates opened as they approached, swung behind them. Sentries commenced their slow circuit of the stockade, eyes probing the distance.

The little group of civilians watched the easy movements of military drill, glanced uncomfortably at each other, avoided the huddled figure on the ground. They, too, moved away, some to their laboratories housed in the low wooden huts, others back to their bunks.

The compound grew deserted but for the lone figure against one wall. After awhile he staggered to his feet, rested against the rough timbers a moment, wincing at the pain from his back, then stumbled painfully away.

A bird, scaly necked, leather winged, soared on fitful thermal currents, watching the scene below with curiously bright eyes. It wheeled, flapped rustling wings, then it too was gone.

The choking heat of the Venusian morning rolled across the deserted compound.



Ken Drayton looked up with sudden annoyance at the click of the door. Harrison, florid face streaming sweat, entered, kicked the flimsy panel shut behind him, slumped into a chair.

"I didn't see you this morning," he grunted. "Why not?"

Ken sighed, deliberately closed the file he had been studying, and turned to face the Commander. "I told you my reasons yesterday. Need I repeat them?"

"I issued a general order. All personnel to watch Lassiter's punishment. As Commander I expect my orders to be obeyed. Why didn't you attend?"

"I didn't want to," Ken said calmly. He raised a hand to stem the stream of abuse he expected. "Before you say another word, remember this. I am a civilian. A field psychologist. You are in full charge of the military, I in charge of the civilian technicians. I have tried to avoid friction between us, but I'll tell you this. One more such spectacle as this morning, and I forbid my technicians to obey you again. You can shame your own men; I won't have you shaming mine."

"Shame?" Harrison jerked upright in his chair. "What the devil do you mean? How else do you expect me to maintain discipline? I've over two hundred men in my command. They must obey orders. How else can I enforce them unless there is fear of punishment?"

"True," Ken nodded. "But why the whip?"

"Why not? It's quick, easy to administer, and does not weaken

the strength of the garrison by detailing guards to watch a prisoner."

"I see," Ken watched him curiously. "You really believe that, don't you?"

Harrison pursed thin lips, the hooded eyes lowering beneath a perpetual frown. With his short grizzled hair, the ramrod straightness of his back, he looked every inch the professional soldier that he was.

"I do," he snapped curtly.

"You know what will happen now, of course," Ken mused. "You have shamed Lassiter, shamed him beyond bearing. Even you, with your limited knowledge of psychology must be able to foresee the inevitable result."

Harrison gestured impatiently. "Lassiter is a soldier. He will accept the punishment and be all the better for it."

"Will he? What after all was his terrible crime? I tell you that there isn't a man in your command who doesn't sympathize with him."

"He disobeyed my orders," Harrison insisted stubbornly.

"Wrong orders."

"No. Orders designed to safeguard the lives of us all."

"Nonsense," Ken snorted. He glowered at the stocky commander, his long slightly saturnine face registering his disgust. "We've been here almost three years, and in all that time there has not been one instance of hostile action."

"Naturally. My men have seen to that."

"You think so?" Ken glowered at the file before him. "Aren't you rather overrating your power? Two hundred men with limited ammunition and fire-power against a whole planet. We could have been wiped out anytime during the past three years. We haven't been."

"Nevertheless, my orders stand. There will be no fraternization with the animal life of this planet."

"You fool!" Ken exploded. "Why are you so blind? Animal life! Why anyone can see that the natives are human. If we are to get anywhere at all we must have contact. Lassiter would have given us that. He is the only one of us all who has ever spent more than a few minutes with a Venusian," he grimaced. "And you have to whip him for it."

"Animal life," repeated Harrison doggedly. "They may look slightly human, that I'll admit, but think a moment. We are on

Venus. A totally new world. How can the native life be anything near human?" He shook his head. "They are no more human than monkeys or apes are human. I won't have any man of my command cheapening himself and disgusting his comrades by associating with them. That is your job."

"Is it?" Ken smiled grimly. "Listen Harrison, I'll make a prophecy. Lassiter was one of the first arrivals, wasn't he? That means he's been here several years without the company of a woman. I've been watching him. I've noticed the general deterioration of morale. Lassiter isn't the only one, and I noticed the change in him after he met this native. A woman wasn't it?"

"A female," agreed Harrison. He looked his disgust. "He said that he met it while on patrol; he had stopped to adjust his equipment. It came from the jungle; for some weird reason they continued to meet. How he managed it I don't know, but it's stopped now."

Ken frowned; he noted Harrison's determination not to admit humanity to the natives, even in designation of sex." Not for the first time he felt intense frustration at the unworkable dual command forced on them both. He tried to hide his anger.

"Lassiter was bored, miserable, unhappy. He hated the relentless routine of conditions here; it wouldn't be going too far to say that he was becoming a pathological case. Then he met this woman. Immediately he changed. He found comfort with the woman, a new life, a lessening of the pressure and strain. Then you had him flogged."

"I had warned him. I have warned them all."

"Maybe, but now what happens. He feels degraded. Life here has become even more unbearable. He needs comforting. Where else would he find that comfort but with the woman who has innocently been the cause of his trouble?" Ken thrust the folded file back into the cabinet.

"I predict that Lassiter will desert as soon as he is able."

Harrison laughed. He rocked in the flimsy chair, his still florid features convulsed with merriment. Ken eyed him with intense distaste.

"What's so funny?"

"He'll desert, will he?" Harrison chuckled. "How wrong you are," he wiped his eyes. "Aren't you forgetting something?"

"What?"

"How's he ever going to get back home?"
The door swung behind him.

* * * * *

Sergeant Bob Foster wiped sweat from his eyes, and peered into the dimly lit depths of the jungle. It was hot. The towering bulk of the fern like trees, wreathed with their garlands of vine and creeper, stretched on all sides. The path, beaten by continuous patrols, traced a thin line before them. Mechanically he plodded on.

For some reason he couldn't forget the episode of the morning. Lassiter, tied, flogged, treated like an animal. Unconsciously his hand curled, feeling again the butt of the crude whip. He hadn't wanted to flog Lassiter. He had protested, yielding only with the mental reservation to make the punishment as easy as possible. Harrison, damn him, had stopped that. He had cried for the sight of blood, and he'd had it.

An insect, brilliant winged, hovered with a faint drone above the path. Foster made a grab at it, and it jerked away with an angry hum. Ahead of him the patrol plunged their wooden way along the beaten track. They walked rather than marched, careless, almost listless, their weapons dangling loosely from slack hands.

Three years, he thought dully. Three years of utter waste, eternally prepared for a non-existent enemy. Day after day, the same routine patrol, the same manual labor. First it had been clearing the landing field, then erecting the barracks, then clearing the field again. Things grew on Venus. How they grew! Even the little truck gardens cultivated as a means of recreation by the garrison, bore exotic fruits and vegetables rare even in the tropics of Earth. Venus was a paradise, but what was paradise to Adam without Eve?

He wiped his face again, shifting the slim barreled Vennor to a more comfortable position. He thought of Lassiter again, this time with a sick envy. A woman to talk to. A real woman. Someone to smile at, to be tender to, perhaps even to touch.

He stopped, listening to the faint dying sounds made by the patrol ahead of him. From a sweat soaked pocket of his shirt he pulled a wallet. Carefully he slid out a creased and tattered slip of paper. For awhile he stared at the photograph, his lips tightening with sudden exasperation. His wife, and she hadn't even written for the past three supply rockets. With sudden anger he twisted

the photograph to pulp, flung it aside. It fell in a clump of rank growths; he watched it moodily, searching his pockets for a ration cigarette.

The smoke calmed him—that, and the quiet almost cathedral like atmosphere of the towering trees and the dimlit jungle. He stretched, snubbed out the cigarette, carefully salvaging the butt. Vennor in one hand he lurched to his knees, half rolled, straightened—and froze in sudden immobility.

A woman stood in the path.

Tall, with a wealth of fine hair spilling from her forehead, rippling down her back. A single garment of some silken fabric, looped over one shoulder, draped under one arm, fell in soft full folds to just below her knees. Her arms were bare, her feet covered in crude sandals of what seemed to be bark. The dim light filtering through the thick jungle touched her hair, giving the startling first impression that she wore a halo.

A Venusian!

She had seen him, Foster knew. Carefully he stepped toward her, the Vennor deliberately pointing at the ankle thick loam of the jungle floor.

"Hello," he said, and smiled.

She didn't answer. Foster swallowed hard, extended his empty hand. "Friend," he said. "Earthman." He touched his chest. "Bob."

Still no answer. Still she stood calmly before him, the wide eyes staring vaguely at a point just above his head. Carefully he stepped closer. Despite himself ugly thoughts reared in the back of his mind. Native or not, she was woman. They were alone, and it had been a long time, such a long time.

Finally the woman acknowledged his presence. Her face twisted a little, with an expression strangely like disgust; she flickered, and somehow was standing just off the path. Desperately he followed her, hating himself for his own involuntary thoughts.

"Please," he begged. "Don't go away. Just let me talk to you. I know that you can't understand a word I'm saying, but at least let me see you again."

In the half light of the jungle her fantastically white skin seemed to glow with an inner light. Her hair, blonde to the point of colorless, clouded behind her. The wide staring eyes had a reddish tinge. From somewhere down the path a voice called, the patrol returning to look for him. Bitterly he cursed, and stepped nearer to the woman.

"I must go now," he said slowly and distinctly. "You be here tomorrow," he pointed to where the sun shone through the clouds in a great patch of golden light. He swept his arm in a circle, pointed at the sun again. "This time tomorrow. Understand?" He pointed at his chest, then at her, swept his arm in a circle again, then stabbed it at the ground between them.

"Tomorrow."

He stepped back onto the path, the Vennor unconsciously menacing the approaching patrol.

* * * * *

Ken sat moodily in the crowded recreation hut, letting the whirling blades of the fan try to cool his skin. Automatically he swallowed several salt pills, washing them down with tepid water. It was night. The gates of the compound were locked; only the patrolling guards, cursing the insect laden darkness of their eternal march, stirred. All the rest were miserably trying to get comfortable in the stifling humidity.

Wilson, the biologist, slumped into a vacant chair beside him. Ken grunted a greeting. "Anything new?"

"New? Of course there is. There always will be for the next hundred years. How long do you think it takes to classify a planetful of specimens?"

"Sorry," apologized Ken with a wry grin. "I didn't mean exactly that."

"I know what you meant," sighed Wilson. "And the answer is the same. If we could only contact the natives, enlist their aid, it would make things so much easier." He clenched a fist, the knuckles whitening beneath the strain; he looked at it curiously. "You know, Drayton, sometimes I get the strangest feeling."

"Yes?" encouraged Ken.

Wilson laughed. "Always on the job, aren't you? Always watching our reactions; I can't say that I blame you; Harrison's not much help."

Ken grunted noncommittally.

"Have you ever felt as if you'd like to smash things?" Wilson asked. "You know what I mean, like as if you've been trying to make something for a long time, and it keeps going wrong; finally you smash it and the feeling is wonderful."

"I know what you mean."

"Do you?" Wilson grinned self consciously. "I wish I did. I feel like that now. All this," he gestured at the night outside, "all this is too big for us. There's too much to learn, too much to do. A whole new world, and we can't even get started. Sometimes I feel as if I'd like to smash it, and go back home."

"Why don't you?"

"And regret it for the rest of my life?" Wilson shook his head. "No. It's too great a challenge. Every day I find something new, every day the mystery deepens."

"Mystery?"

"Of course," Wilson relaxed his hand. "Think of it a moment. Venus geologically speaking is in the Mesozoic period: there should be Dinosauria—and no men. Instead we find no Dinosauria, and natives that act like no natives I've ever seen before. It's out of my line, but isn't it the rule that primitive peoples always show curiosity?"

"Harrison regards the native life as animal," Ken said drily. "Animals are to a certain extent, unpredictable."

"That's nonsense," blurted Wilson angrily. "Animals don't wear clothes. I've seen the natives, not often—no one has seen them often—but a few times at least. They are human." He clenched his fist again. "If I could only examine one," he breathed. "If only they would let me examine one of their dead."

"Don't mention that to Harrison," Ken said sharply. "He may send out a hunting party."

"Of course not, but it would answer so many problems."

"Maybe," Ken answered curtly. He was growing tired of the conversation. Like most specialists he couldn't understand fanatic interest in any field but his own. His interest in the natives was purely psychological. He wanted to know why they had ignored the Earthmen, why they had refused any form of contact. But the thought of dissecting one was repugnant.

Yet it would answer the major problem. Were they human, fantastic as the possibility sounded, or were they, as Harrison insisted, merely animals with alien ways? When first the expedition had landed the riotous growth of what had loosely been called the jungle had made the crews wary. They had imagined great beasts, savage alien life; they hadn't found any, but what they did see had caused even greater alarm.

Human seeming shapes had been spotted at the edges of the clearing. They stood upright, wore clothes, seemed to be men. None had ever been captured; they had an uncanny knack of melting into the shielding growth of the jungle at the approach of search parties. For awhile sight of them had been common, then they had gone, but the damage had been done.

A world, geared to the highest pitch of militarism, had acted in the only way possible to a people steeped in thoughts of violence. Earthmen, desperate for new land, spurred by the tantalizing promise of a new paradise, had acted to safeguard the bridgehead. Two hundred men, armed with the deadliest portable weapons yet devised, had embarked for the new planet. For three years they had stood ready to defend the outpost. For three years they had patrolled the jungle. For three years they had expected sudden attack.

They were still waiting.

Grimly Ken wondered just how long they would be content to merely wait.

Sergeant Bob Foster tossed on his narrow cot, cursed the heat, the regulations that switched off all lights at too early an hour, the confines of the barrack hut.

He felt restless, the episode of the day remained too fresh in his mind. He sat up, fumbled for a cigarette, struck a light. Replacing the cigarettes his hand struck against the pocket containing his wallet. As he had done so often before, he opened it, groped for the tattered photograph, hoping to decipher it by the light from the glowing tip of his cigarette.

His fingers met emptiness, and he remembered his angry gesture while on patrol. Thought of one thing led to thought of another; within seconds he was reliving his meeting with the native woman.

She *was* human, he thought desperately. No animal could ever look like that. Logic, reason, the ingrained indoctrination of the past three years, all affirmed that there could be no humans on Venus. Instinct told him that there were. He had to know.

Carefully he slipped from the cot, donned shorts, fumbled his way to the connecting door. A voice muttered a sleepy question; he ignored it, felt his cautious way onwards. Behind him, a corporal felt curiously at his empty bed.

Lassiter wasn't asleep. The savage pain from his lacerated back wouldn't permit him to even rest in comfort. He lay, eyes staring

into the darkness, lips drawn into a thin line. Foster carefully touched his shoulder.

"What?"

"Hush. It's me, Foster. Sergeant Foster. I want to talk to you."

"Why?" bitterness echoed in the harsh whisper.

"I don't blame you for hating me, but you shouldn't. I couldn't help it; I had to do as ordered. If I hadn't, we'd have both been flogged."

"So logic justifies your action," Lassiter laughed harshly. "What do you want me to do, forgive you?"

"No," Foster dropped his voice even lower. "I want to ask you something; will you answer me?"

"How do I know yet? What is it?"

"You knew a native, didn't you? A Venusian. A female. Tell me, are they human?"

"Are you? Is Harrison?" Lassiter repeated dully.

"Never mind that. Tell me, are they human?"

"Ask Harrison," Lassiter moved carefully on the cot. "He will tell you, and believe me, a whip can be very convincing."

Foster sat numbly on the edge of the bed. He felt clammy, the sweat trickling down his body. "I saw one today," he said dully. "It was while on patrol. I'd stopped behind for a smoke; nothing ever happens on patrol anyway. She was standing in the path. I spoke to her. I want to see her again." Sudden anger shook him. "Damn you, Lassiter. You've got to help me. How did you arrange your meetings? How did you tell her that you wanted to see her again?"

"Do you?"

"Yes." It sounded like a prayer.

"I see," Lassiter sounded strange. "I can't help you, Foster. I feel sorry for you, but I can't help you."

"Why not? Can't you understand, Lassiter? Forget that I flogged you, forget that you hate me, forget everything but that I saw a woman, and I want to meet her more than anything else in the world."

"More than going home?"

Foster hesitated. "Must it mean that?"

"It may."

"I see." Dully he rose to his feet. "Thanks anyway. I'm sorry about this morning. Does it hurt bad?"

"It doesn't matter—now."

Foster looked down at the vague blackness against the dim patch of the sheet. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing. Goodnight."

"Goodnight." He hesitated a moment, then fumbled his careful way back to the adjoining barrack room. Once he thought he heard a sound, the quick hiss of indrawn breath; for a moment he stood poised on one foot, eyes straining to penetrate the thick darkness. Finally he shrugged, grouped his way to his cot.

He was a long time falling asleep.

* * * * *

Ken sucked at an empty pipe, stared through the double wire mesh and plastic of the window, and frowned at the flimsy sheet of paper before him. Not for the first time he felt keenly the helplessness of his position. He had a dozen technicians in his charge; Harrison had two hundred men. The balance of power was ludicrous, and unworkable. Someone tapped on the door.

"Come in," Ken called. For once he was glad of an interruption. The doctor eased through the door, stared around the empty room.

"Sorry," he apologized, "I was looking for Lassiter. Have you seen him?"

"Lassiter?" Ken frowned. "No. Why should I have?"

"Well you're the psychologist; I'm only the doctor. I wanted to have a look at his back."

"I see," Ken nodded. "The man who was flogged. No, I haven't seen him. What made you think I had?"

"It's logical, isn't it? After what happened to him he'll be in need of psychological treatment. Modern treatment I mean, not the old type of 'spare the rod', etc."

Ken laughed. "I had let it slip my mind. Ask him to drop in when you've finished with him, will you?"

The doctor nodded, left the room; reluctantly Ken turned to his desk again. Abruptly the door jerked open, slammed shut. Harrison glared about the room.

"Where is he?"

"Who?" snapped Ken angrily.

"You know who. Lassiter. I guessed that he'd come whining to you for help. Where is he?"

"How the hell do I know?" Ken barked. "He's one of your men, not mine. What's the matter with him anyway?" Suddenly realization came. He stared at Harrison, and grinned sardonically. "He's deserted."

"No," blustered the red faced commander. "He wouldn't dare." He slumped into a chair. "We just can't find him," he added uncertainly.

"He's deserted," Ken repeated. "I warned you of what would happen. I was right. Lassiter's gone."

Harrison ran thick fingers through his grizzled hair. "Maybe you're right," he admitted. Anger swelled his neck. "I'll teach him. I'll flog the flesh from his bones. I'll work him until he drops. I'll refuse his passage back home." He bared his teeth. "There'll be no more desertions."

"Yes there will," Ken snapped. "This is only the beginning. I've noticed the drop in morale. Your men are getting homesick. Restless. Woman hungry. It only wants one successful example and they will filter away." He stared at the angry commander. "At least they will if they don't get a more intelligent Commanding Officer."

"What!"

For a moment Ken thought that Harrison would strike him. Unconsciously he tensed, leg muscles tightening, ready to whirl away from the expected blow.

"Steady," he snapped. "Listen to me. I warned you what would happen. You can't treat men as you have been without asking for trouble. Harsh discipline. Senseless routine patrols. The insistence of the inhumanity of the natives, when all their instincts tell them that you are wrong. Finally the flogging. Did you think that intelligent men—and they are intelligent—would accept that? By lowering one, you lowered them all. They feel guilty, ashamed; they hate themselves, but they need a scapegoat. You're the scapegoat."

"You fool!" Harrison sneered. "You utter fool! What do you know of men? You only know diseased minds. I've handled men all my life. Soldiered in a dozen countries. I know how to handle them. Discipline! Discipline and more discipline. Keep them busy. Keep them from thinking too much. It was good enough for three years; it will be good enough for a further two."

"No," protested Ken. "No."

"What do you know about it? You and your petty handful of sickly technicians? We can conquer Venus without you. We will conquer Venus."

"I see," said Ken. He slumped back into his chair, anger draining away as understanding came. "You poor fool! You poor blind fool!" Abruptly a siren wailed across the compound.

The radio officer threw them a quick grin as they tumbled into his shack. Overhead the umbrella of the radar beam swung a little as he delicately touched the controls.

"They're early this time," he grunted absently. "Didn't expect them for a week. Nearly surprised me out of my skin when I heard the radio call."

"How far out?" snapped Harrison.

"Not far. Within five hundred at least. Hard to tell."

Ken sighed. Sitting at the door of the low hut he stared hard at the solid sheet of thick cloud, eternally shielding the planet. He didn't envy the crew of the approaching ship. For the last part of their journey they traveled blind, only the intermittent signals of the radio beam guiding them to the landing field.

A mutter grew in the air, high up, like a distant roll of thunder. The compound was full of men, the stockade echoing to the sharp sounds of yelled commands. Order grew from chaos. Smoothly the men assembled, split into groups, marched from the compound. Dispersal. The only safeguard in case something went wrong.

Ken wished that his group were as mobile. The technicians had gone of course, but the laboratories, the precious equipment, the files, specimens, all the fruit of months of grinding work, could not be moved. Ken shuddered as he thought of the debacle a slight error of judgment could cause.

High above, trembling on the very edge of visibility, a second sun came into being. A splotch of light, widening, golden through the twisting clouds. The eye searing flare of rocket tubes.

It came nearer, nearer. Sound grew. Thundering, screaming against the stockade, pressing with almost physical force against the tensely watching men. Something broke from the lower limit of the clouds. Slipped aside a little. Roared a flaring note of power, and fell abruptly silent.

The radio man wiped a streaming forehead.

"Everytime they come in I feel as if I want to run," he complained to no one in particular.

Harrison breathed a deep sigh. With quick strides he moved across the compound, heading towards the orderly room. More curious, Ken joined the radio man as he eagerly headed for the nearby landing field.

"It's a crazy idea, having the radio beacon inside the compound," he chattered as they walked. "The ship has to land near it. One slip, and we get two hundred tons of metal on our heads."

"The beacon had to be within the compound for protection," Ken explained, though he knew the radio man already knew the answer to his own complaint. "Without the beacon we'd be helpless. The ship couldn't land, and we'd be stranded."

"Not as bad as that," protested the radio operator. "The first ship didn't have a guiding beacon."

"We were lucky," recalled Ken. Just how lucky they had been was a minor miracle. They had avoided the turbulent seas covering two thirds of the planet. They had missed the mountains and swamps which covered almost all the rest. They had even missed the towering fern trees which could so easily have tilted them out of control three hundred feet from the ground. Instead they had landed on one of the few relatively flat stretches of solid ground, in one of the scattered clearings studding the thickness of the jungle.

He finished the short walk in silence. The field lay a few hundred yards from the compound, a wide expanse of cleared jungle. The ship rested to one side, half off the clearing. Men were busy beating out several small fires started by the splash of the jets. The radio operator looked critically at the ship.

"That's a new one. Look at the low flat construction. More like a deep pie dish than anything else. Better than the old dart shaped ones. More stability for landing; less liability to tilt. I'll bet that they can even give it lateral motion on the way down."

Ken, remembering how the ship had seemed to slip sideways just before landing, nodded.

"Wonder what they brought this time?" he murmured.

His only answer was a sharp crack from the contracting metal of the jets.

The pilot stretched short legs, cocked his head slightly at the outstretched glass, and downed the contents in a single swallow.

"Good stuff," he remarked, suggestively extending the empty container.

"We make it from one of the local fruits," explained Wilson. "It's rather a nice drink."

The pilot nodded, relaxing in the big chair. Around him clustered the technicians, the top grade officers, and as many of the junior staff as could squeeze inside the recreation hut. The ship had been unloaded, mail distributed. Most of the garrison were busy writing letters home, eager to catch departure time early next morning.

"Made a quick trip this time, didn't you?" asked the radio operator.

"Fair," agreed the pilot. "We stopped blasting at ten miles a second, cut almost two weeks off the trip." He sipped at his drink. "Things are beginning to speed up a little. Three new ships almost ready—improved design, more cargo space and payload." He grinned. "Two more years and you can expect an invasion."

Ken grunted dubiously. "Anticipating things, aren't they?"

"I don't think so," protested the pilot. "After all you've been here three years and nothing much has happened. Venus seems to be harmless. Why wait longer?"

"It's a new planet," reminded Wilson. "We can hardly be expected to learn all about it in three short years."

"No need to. If there were dangerous diseases, animal life, natives, that would be different, but there aren't. What's to stop people moving in?"

Harrison cleared his throat. "Within another two years Venus will be ready for them," he promised.

Ken flashed him a sharp look. "What's new from Mars?" he asked to change the subject. The pilot shrugged.

"Not too good. I'm glad I'm off that run. You should see them. No comfort, no decent food, no hope." He stared at his glass. "I suppose that's the trouble really. No hope. Ten years, and still they haven't managed to grow a single blade of grass. Everything they use has to be imported. The whole project seems to be a dead loss." He grinned around the room. "You don't know when you're well off."

"I don't know," demurred Ken. "We have our own problems."

"Maybe," said the pilot. Ken could see that he didn't believe him. "I'll be having problems too if I don't get back to the ship. With but a two man crew half of it mustn't slack." He struggled

reluctantly to his feet. "Blast off's at eight tomorrow. Get all mail and dispatches aboard by six."

A bottle beneath each arm he steered his passage towards the door. Many of the junior officers accompanied him on the short walk towards the landing field. Ken looked at Wilson.

"Think we can do it?"

"Solve all our problems within two years?" Wilson shrugged. "I doubt if it will make a bit of difference. We've lived here, that will be good enough for anyone. When the tales of virgin forests, untapped minerals, exotic fruits and rapid growing truck gardens are released, watch out for the deluge."

"Then what?" asked Ken bitterly. "Shanty towns. Open-cut mining. Ravished forests. The works." He sighed.

"You don't like civilization, do you?" Wilson said.

"Let's just say that I don't like the things civilization brings with it," suggested Ken. "To me this is a new world. I'd hate to see it turned into a carbon copy of the old."

"Maybe the natives will have something to say about it?" Wilson sounded forlornly hopeful.

"Maybe they will," agreed Ken. "And maybe they'll get the same answer that others got. Remember Cortez? Remember the "Black Ivory" of the Gold Coast. Remember the Red Indians?" He slowly rose to his feet. "I feel depressed tonight," he apologized. "But I'm worried. I keep thinking of two hundred men. Two hundred men armed with Vennors. It would take just one itchy trigger finger to start something almost impossible to stop."

"I don't get you?" Wilson frowned.

"Tell me," Ken said quietly, "just how long would it take two hundred men, shooting at everything in sight, to depopulate Venus?"

"A long time, I'd say," Wilson answered uneasily. "A few years at least."

"Could we say two years?" Ken nodded at Wilson's startled face. "Goodnight."

He walked slowly into the insect-droning night.

* * * * *

The men stood assembled in the first light of dawn. Even though the sun had not yet really warmed the air, the heat was stifling. Shirts stuck to backs, webbing cut into sweat softened skin. Heat

irritation made legs and arms twitch with a thousand prickles. An orderly officer called the role.

"Sergeant Fox."

"Here."

"Sergeant Brown."

"Here."

"Sergeant Foster."

No answer.

"Sergeant Foster?" The officer looked up irritably. "Has anyone seen Sergeant Foster?"

A corporal stepped forward.

"Yes? What is it?"

"Sergeant Foster left his hut last night, sir."

"Was he sick?"

"No, sir."

"I see." The officer bit his lip. "Sergeant Brown. Finish calling the role. Corporal. Come with me."

Together they strode toward the orderly room.

Harrison listened to the news in grim silence. With an abrupt gesture he dismissed the lieutenant, fastened the trembling corporal with an evil stare.

"Why didn't you report this earlier?"

"I thought . . ." began the corporal. "I mean . . ." he stammered.

"Never mind what you thought," roared Harrison. "You are not here to think. Now. What do you know?"

The door slammed open. Ken entered the room.

"What do you want?" snarled Harrison.

"I've just heard the news," Ken replied calmly. "I think that maybe I can help you."

"I don't need your help," Harrison snapped. "This is purely a military matter. I must ask you not to interfere."

Ken glanced significantly at the corporal. "Perhaps we had better discuss this afterwards. In the meantime, let me remind you that I am nominally in full charge of this expedition. Shall we continue?"

Harrison grunted, the veins swelling in his thick neck. With an effort he mastered himself, and turned back to the corporal.

"You state that Foster left his hut last night. How do you know?"

"I couldn't sleep very well, sir. I awoke several times. I thought that perhaps a smoke would help. I didn't have any cigarettes, so

went across to sergeant Foster's bed, to borrow one. It was empty."

"What time was this?"

"I don't know, sir. I haven't a watch."

"Naturally," grunted Harrison. "I am aware that owing to weight restrictions there are few watches among us. Did you notice anything that would give you an idea of the time? The guard being changed? Something like that?"

"No, sir."

"Is that all you can tell us?"

The corporal hesitated. "Yes, sir."

"Very well. Dismissed."

"One moment." Ken stepped forward. "Has the sergeant ever been absent from his bed before?"

"Once, at least, that I know of, sir."

Harrison grunted. "Nothing to that. Maybe he went to the latrines."

"No, sir," protested the corporal. "I thought that too, but he hadn't."

"When was this?" asked Ken curiously.

"The same evening of the day Lassiter was flogged, sir."

"I see. Have you anything else to say that might explain Foster's absence?"

"I don't think so, sir, except that something funny has been happening when we were on patrol."

Ken nodded. "I see. What was it?"

"The sergeant made it his habit to take the rear. He would fall behind the main body, a long way behind. On two occasions we had to return for him."

"And when were these occasions?"

"The first one, sir, was directly after Lassiter was flogged. The second time was yesterday."

"Did you see anything, or anyone?" Ken asked intently.

"No, sir."

"Very well. You may go."

The corporal saluted, spun on his heel, marched towards the door.

"One moment," called Ken softly. "You don't like sergeant Foster, do you?"

The corporal hesitated, one hand on the door latch.

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"No reason, sir."

"That is all."

Ken looked grimly at the closing door.

Harrison slammed a hard fist against the top of the desk before him. "Another one," he snapped harshly. "Another damned stinking deserter." He jerked to his feet.

"Where are you going?"

"Where? To call out the garrison of course. I'll comb the jungle for them. I'll search every tree and clump of growth, but I'll find them." Something feral shone briefly in the depths of his narrowed eyes. "I'll teach them to desert."

"Wait," snapped Ken urgently. "Listen to me for a moment." He grabbed Harrison's arm, and almost threw him back into his chair. "Let's be logical about this."

"Logical? Go to hell." Harrison strained against the restraining hand. "I'm going to get those deserters if it's the last thing I do."

"And leave the compound undefended?" asked Ken quietly.

Harrison shot him a startled look. "You think that's what's behind all this?" he mused for a moment. "Possible of course, damned possible. Sound military strategy. You think that's what they want?"

"Isn't it logical?" evaded Ken. "Now listen. Foster couldn't have stowed away on the ship; he was here after it had left. He must have gone into the jungle. All I'm interested in, is why? Why should he desert? I can understand Lassiter going, it was the only thing he could do; psychologically, it was inevitable. But why Foster?"

"Same reason," snapped Harrison. "Had been associating with one of the animals, and was afraid of discovery. That corporal probably had him worried; he knew what to expect, so he left before he got it."

"I don't think so," Ken said slowly. "It was obvious that the corporal hated Foster; I doubt if even he could give a good reason for his dislike, it's just one of those things to be expected when too many men are gathered together too long. It isn't natural for soldiers to carry tales to their officers about each other." He frowned at the door. "I expect trouble from that corporal soon."

"Why?"

"Guilt complex. He has broken an unwritten law. If the others don't take it out of him, he'll take it out of himself."

Harrison grunted impatiently. "Forget your nonsense now; this is important. What do you propose to do?"

"Nothing. We have no evidence that the natives intend us harm. Those men left under their own volition; the natives cannot be blamed. They will return the same way." He stared thoughtfully at the floor. "I hope that they don't return. Neither of them."

"What! Why?"

"Their example has already unsettled the men. If they come back with glowing reports, it will be hard to hold them. Suppose Foster returns. You whip him, imprison him, but you can't stop him talking. What would happen if he describes a paradise? A village of beautiful complacent women, good plentiful food, friendly men? Whom do you think the men would believe? You, with your insistence that the natives are animals, or Foster, who tells them what they want to hear?"

"So we do nothing," sneered Harrison. "The perfect solution." He glared at Ken with undisguised contempt.

"I think it only fair to warn you," Ken continued quietly, "that in my report to Headquarters, I have recommended that you be recalled."

"What?"

"On grounds of mental instability. I am sorry to tell you this, Harrison, but you are displaying all the symptoms of mental ill health."

"You're mad!"

"No. You are. I've watched you closely during the past three years, and you are not the man you once were. You are developing megalomania. I cannot tolerate a man in your position with such a malady."

"I see," Harrison snapped. To Ken's surprise he showed no anger. "Call a man mad, and the more he denies it, the more he is displaying symptoms. All I can say is that you are wasting your time. Headquarters, thank God, have a few men left—not whining weaklings blaming their own lack of manhood on the nonsense you peddle. So I am a madman, am I? Mad or not, I can cure the ailments plaguing this planet. Within two years the settlers are coming; I shall have this planet ready for them. Do you know what cargo the ship brought? Not men, I don't need anymore men. Not guns, I have enough. Ammunition. That's what they sent me.

Bullets. Bullets for the Vennors. Bullets to make elbow room for the men of Earth. Bullets to win a world!"

His voice dropped to almost a crooning sound. Little flecks of spittle hung at the corners of his lips. His eyes had a glazed look.

Ken stared at him with horror.

* * * * *

The man walked across the compound. He was wearing full battle equipment. Suddenly he flung himself to the ground, twisting his body as he fell. Before he hit the soft loam the slim barreled Vennor had spat sharply. He rolled once, squeezed off three more shots. Harrison nodded with satisfaction.

"Quick reaction. What's the score?"

An aid squinted at the wig-wagging flag showing above the hastily erected bank of dirt at the end of the stockaded area.

"Four shots, sir. Three hits, one near miss."

"Good enough," grunted the commander. "Continue with practice. Four rounds a man."

Ken watched the slowly moving file of soldiers, a sick dismay gnawing at the pit of his stomach. The humid air seemed tainted with the burnt fumes of explosives. The crack of the Vennors echoed from the high stockade, whispered from towering fern trees, undulated from the depths of the silent jungle.

It was the old story, Ken thought. Perhaps it had started with a man named Halberd. Certainly with one named Ferrara. But perhaps the honors should really go to Colt. Colt, Winchester, Browning. Martini. Maxim. Gatling. Lewis. Luger. Mauser. Bren. Bofors. Spandau, the names seethed through his mind. All with the same claim to fame—they had invented a better means of killing than their predecessors.

Now it was Vennor, the man who had proved that large calibre wasn't essential if you had high velocity. The guns that bore his name spat a five millimeter slug, either singly or in a stream. They had a terrific velocity—choked barrels and improved charges had seen to that. The tiny slugs hit with an impact sufficient to kill by shock alone. A man receiving a direct hit on any part of the body, died.

So great was the speed of the slugs, that if they struck an unyielding surface, they flashed into incandescent gas. With a Vennor it

was possible to fell a tree, blow a hole through any barrier other than thick steel, spray a stream of invisible destruction impossible to resist. But, they needed ammunition, lots of ammunition. The supply rocket had provided it.

Ken turned away, bumped into Wilson. The biologist looked worried; he jerked his head at the file of soldiers.

"The noise woke me up. What's happening?"

"Harrison's playing with his toys," Ken said bitterly.

"Why?" Wilson frowned at the flare of exploding bullets. "Does he expect trouble?"

"He always expects trouble. When he doesn't get it, he makes it." He stood for a moment deep in thought. "Call the rest of the technicians, will you, Wilson? Assemble them in the recreation hut. I want to call a general council."

Wilson looked at him, let his eyes stray to the soldiers, nodded. Ken watched him stride towards the laboratories, his gait remarkably like that of an elderly duck; he didn't smile—he was past smiling.

They sat around the empty hut, all twelve of them. Ken stood in the center of the little group, his eyes scanning them one by one. Wilson, the biologist. Fenshaw, the geologist. Cardon, the entomologist. Bense, the chemist. They sat with the other eight in a rough circle, and all of them looked serious.

"I've called you here because I believe that the emergency warrants it. I'm sorry to have taken you from your studies; I know that some of you have delicate experiments needing constant attention, yet still I feel that this is more important." Ken paused. He felt a little cynical, but with such men it was necessary to lead rather than drive. He was nominally in full charge of them all, but he could only hold their allegiance while he held their respect, and ignoring their experiments was no way to be popular.

"We know that, Ken," Wilson said. He looked around the little group. "I think that we are all agreed that there is an emergency?"

Heads-nodded. Some gravely, some impatiently, they all signified their agreement.

"Harrison has decided to take things into his own hands. As you all know, we have adopted a policy of slow but safe investigation. We have classified, examined, and in general, let well alone. Now we are faced with a crisis."

"Are we?" Fenshaw looked startled. "What is it?"

"For reasons best known to himself, Harrison has decided on a policy of ruthless extermination of all native life." Ken jerked his head towards the compound. "The men are in training now."

"What?" Cardon leaped angrily to his feet. "I won't allow it. Who authorized such a decision?"

"No one." Ken lifted a calming hand. "I think that I should tell you that I have recommended Harrison's recall; however, it is not so easy."

"You must stop him," Cardon snapped tersely. "If he does that, who knows what may be irrevocably destroyed."

"I have tried to stop him," Ken said quietly. "I have reasoned with him, urged him, but it does no good."

"Why not?"

"Because Harrison is insane."

The door of the hut burst open.

Harrison stood just within the portal, thumbs hooked in the wide leather belt he affected, and stared at the assembled technicians with undisguised contempt.

"I heard you," he snapped at Ken. "Calling me mad again, aren't you? Well, I'll show you how mad I am."

He stood, wide legged, his narrowed eyes ranging over the ring of tense white faces. "From now on you are all under military jurisdiction; that means that you do as I say, when I say it."

"Not so fast," Ken barked. "You can't do that, and you know it." He turned to the technicians. "You are witnesses to this. At the Court Martial, for there will be a Court Martial, remember this. Harrison was sent here to protect us. He was placed beneath my orders. His troops were to be used only as and when I ordered. What he is doing is mutiny." He glared at the choleric face of the Major. "Harrison, you are relieved of your command."

"As you wish, sir," sneered Harrison. He half opened the door behind him. Beyond the panel soldiers stood ranked, the sun glinting from the barrels of their Vennors. He shut the door again.

"Would you care to try and take my command?"

Ken sighed. He had known it was futile, but he was still human enough to feel anger, even though he despised himself for it.

"What will you say when your relief arrives?"

Harrison shrugged. "If it arrives," he corrected. "In any case I cannot be recalled for at least six months. If I know the working

of Headquarters, it will be nearer a year; by that time much can happen."

"Such as?"

"Venus will be ready for the settlers," Harrison smiled thinly. "You have yet to learn, Drayton, that men do not cry over spilt milk. What cannot be undone, must be condoned. I shall not be penalized. I shall be commended. I shall give to Earth a new world, free of all potentially dangerous life. The ends, my dear Drayton, justify the means."

"Men will revile you," protested Wilson in a shocked voice. "Future generations will spit on your name."

"Maybe," agreed Harrison calmly. "That is always the fate of the pioneer. But *men* will not spit on my name. Weaklings, perhaps. Sniveling cowards, weak excuses of men who dwell with their minds in the past. They may revile me, but only because it is their habit to sneer at their betters. Men, real men, will understand."

The air felt very close; Ken could feel the rivulets of sweat trickling down his back. There was a tension in the air, an electric feeling, not wholly caused by human emotions. He tried to speak calmly, telling himself that he was dealing with a sick man.

"I know how you feel," he said gently. "But is there any need of this haste? The natives have not harmed us. Why destroy that which is irreplaceable? There are men who have given their names to the world, made them into common nouns. Ampere was one, Volt, another. They are names to be proud of. There are others. Quisling, De Sade, yes, even Vennor. Those names are only heard in connection with death and evil. Would you like future generations to speak of "Harrisoning" when they talk of the murder of a new race? Would that please you? Wouldn't it be far better for men to build a city here—a city called Harrisonville?"

He paused. The sweat running down his back caused him to twitch and prickle. Harrison stood deep in thought.

"Your motives are good, yet they are motives stemming from wrong thinking. I cannot blame you; you are a soldier. A man such as yourself takes the hard way, the direct way. It is the hard way you know. How often in the years to come will you awake, sweating, regretting what you have done? How can you be sure, really sure, that what you intend doing is right? Sure beyond all question of doubt?"

Ken let his voice sink a little.

"It is a terrible thing to have a feeling of guilt. To kill a man, that is bad. To kill a nation, that is worse. What is it then to wipe out an entire planet? Could you live with that guilt?"

Harrison licked his lips. Ken could see the wet shine of his eyes beneath the frowning brows, the sweat coursing down the lined cheeks. Almost he felt sorry for the man. He could imagine the strain of conflicting desires tearing at Harrison's sanity. He had been so confident, so sure. He had won emotional release by his decision, now again he felt doubt.

While he continued to feel it the Venusians were safe.

* * * * *

The day passed; the night dragged on its weary length; a new day dawned. The sun lifted over the horizon, a wide golden patch on the eternal clouds—angry clouds, twisting and writhing in the grip of some hidden turbulence. Layer upon layer of clouds, shredding, coiling, massing, but never wholly breaking, never showing the unshielded sun, or the momentary glory of clear sky.

Ken stepped from his sleeping quarters, sniffed at the air, squinted at the boiling sky, shrugged irritably.

"Feels as if a storm's due to break," he said to Wilson. The biologist grunted agreement.

"Quicker the better. It needs something to clear the air; my nerves are jumping all over."

Ken nodded. Emotions could be disturbed by climate as easily as by human relationships. A storm, by its psychological effect, would make his work much easier.

Men marched across the compound. Officers bawled orders their voices harsh with unnatural irritation. Men glowered, mouthed silent curses, dragged their way mechanically through the routine drills.

Harrison passed them, frowning as he strode to make personal inspection. As usual his uniform was impeccable, the insignia of rank gleaming from his collar. Guards peered down from the high stockade, watching with interest the movements of the men below.

Harrison strode impatiently down the line of assembled men. Irritably he snatched at the Vennors, peered down their barrels, ran a cold eye over equipment, moved on. Standing well away from the garrison, he watched his men move through the daily drill, his lips thinning angrily as they went through their maneuvers.

Heat, enervation, the tension of the threatening storm, all helped to make the men self conscious, aware of his critical gaze.

They moved sluggishly, were slow to respond to the shouted orders. Tempers grew frayed, sweating officers, aware of the coldly critical eye, fumbled their commands, hesitated, fumbled their weapons.

"Halt!" Harrison roared the terse command. He strode impatiently forward, hands clasped behind his back, head thrust out.

"Call yourself soldiers?" the sarcasm sounded heavily in his voice. "I've seen better in a rookie camp. The cream of all Earth. The gallant defenders of Earth's bridgehead on a new world. Scum!"

Junior officers flushed angrily beneath his contempt. Paradoxically the men tried to hide covert grins. They had created a diversion; they were satisfied.

Harrison stared coldly at them. "Grin you cowardly dogs. Hide your smirks. Haven't you guts enough to laugh in my face?"

"Well, smile while you can, it won't be for long! He jerked his head at a lieutenant. "Full marching order. Thirty mile route march. Non stop. Move!"

"But, sir," the officer protested. "There is a storm threatening."

"What of it?"

"The ground mist, sir. How are we going to find our way back in case of need?"

Wilson plucked Ken's arm. "He's right you know. Compasses are useless here; I bet Harrison's forgotten that."

Harrison grinned ferally at the young officer. "I said a thirty mile route march, didn't I, lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did I say in what direction?" he snarled in sudden anger. "March them around the compound for all I care, but march them until they drop. Move!"

"Yes, sir," the officer flushed, saluted, moved away:

Thunder murmured in the far distance. A few drops of rain slapped against the soft loam, warning of the deluge to come. It grew dark, fitful flickers of lightning dancing on the far horizon. Ken breathed deeply, lifting his face to feel the first drops of warm rain.

"Here it comes," he murmured gratefully.

Something round and black and small hurled through the air.

It rose high above the stockade, swept in a graceful arc, bounced on the ground, rolled almost to his feet.

It had black hair, a white face, a bloody stump of neck. It grimaced, the white teeth gleaming against the black soil.

Wilson retched. Ken stared in sheer horror.

Lassiter grinned—his severed head lying at their feet.

The storm broke.

Rain, blinding deafening rain, fell from the lowering clouds, drenching the sodden ground, filling the already humid air with mist. It was difficult to breathe. It was almost impossible to see. The senses grew numb beneath the steady impact of tons of water. The trees dripped water. The clouds poured water. The ground oozed it. It was everywhere.

Miserably Ken huddled in the folds of his waterproof. Desperately he tried to keep the squat figure of Harrison within the limited range of his vision.

Before him, behind him, all around him, moved the men of the garrison. Armed. Equipped for battle. Loaded with food for their bodies. Loaded more heavily with food for their Vennors. Men with itchy trigger fingers. Men, bored to the verge of insanity, glad of any excuse for violent action. Men who didn't have to worry about the guilt neurosis of their actions.

Men bent on extermination.

He couldn't really blame them, Ken thought dully. Even now the thought of the severed head brought its inevitable reaction. Harrison had acted immediately. The precarious balance of his conflicting emotions had received the impetus he secretly desired. A man had died. An Earthman. Someone had to pay.

Ken fought his way to the head of the column, plucked at the Major's sleeve.

"Can't we at least wait until the rain stops?" he yelled.

Harrison shrugged off his hand. "No. It's our only chance to catch those who threw the head. They won't be expecting us." He sounded happy. Confident that what he was doing was the right thing. Earthmen had to be protected. If they were ever going to win a place on alien worlds, that lesson had to be taught. Taught so that it would never be forgotten.

The rain eased a little. Ken glanced upwards. They had entered a great thicket of trees, the broad leaves breaking the force of the

downpour. He mentioned something which had been worrying him.
"How do we find our way back?"

Harrison gestured towards a man burdened with a metallic box, the thin whip of a radio antenna lashing the air above his shoulder.

"Directional beam. We can guide ourselves by the radio beacon back in the compound."

"I see. What are you going to do now?"

"Fan out. We'll swing in a wide circuit about the area, shoot everything that moves. When we have sterilized the immediate vicinity, I'll send out patrols, quarter as far as we can reach. By the time we can get helicopters from home, I'll have the entire area clear."

From just ahead the sharp crack of a Vennor split the air. Something fell to the soggy ground. A man yelled in triumph.

"What was it?" snapped Harrison.

"Not sure, sir. Here."

The soldier came within vision dragging a bulky something behind him. Ken stared down at a scaly, long necked creature. Fragments of vegetation still showed between the toothless jaws. He made a gesture of distaste.

"A herbivore. Do you have to kill them too?"

"My orders were to shoot everything that moves," Harrison said stubbornly. "It it's dead it can't hurt us." He kicked at the beast with his boot. "Carry on," he ordered the soldier.

Time passed. The spiteful cracks from the Vennors grew, reached a climax, died away to an occasional odd shot. Ken stood at the mounting heap of slaughtered animals. Herbivores, all of them. Some were huge, like the extinct Sloth; some were small, scaled, lizard-like—all were harmless.

He felt sick.

Harrison grew more and more annoyed. He stared at the heap of dead, pulling at his lower lip, glowering into the depths of the forest. Ken knew what troubled him. Harrison was not a naturally cruel man. His orders had been to kill—but he wanted dead natives, not this pitiful heap of useless animal life.

"Not a very pleasant sight, is it, Harrison?" Ken asked quietly. "Look at it. Useless for food. Useless to help you justify yourself. They aren't even harmful, let alone potentially dangerous. Is this the point of your crusade to make a new world safe for man to live on?"

Harrison flinched beneath the sarcasm. "They are unfortunate victims," he grudgingly admitted. "But what can I do? I cannot order my men to discriminate; we don't know enough about the wild life to determine what is harmless and what is not. My orders must stand. Destroy them all."

Snatching a Vennor from his aid, he strode into the dark forest, Ken close on his heels. Harrison glared at him, but made no move to prevent his coming.

Something moved at the edge of vision. Ken squinted, trying to focus the elusive shape. Beside him Harrison grunted with sudden triumph, swung the Vennor to his shoulder.

The shape moved closer, swaying from side to side. Ken heard the hiss of expelled breath, the subconscious tensing of the man at his side. Desperately he grabbed at the slender barrel of the weapon. It spat, the slug tearing from the muzzle, exploding with a vicious crack against the bole of a giant tree. Ken ignored the pain in his hand. Ignored the savage curse Harrison flung at him. He pointed dumbly down the clearing before them.

Swaying, reeling, both hands above his head, tears streaming down his cheeks, a man staggered towards them.

An Earthman.

He hadn't been ill treated. His flesh was firm, his skin clear, even his uniform shirt and shorts showed only the signs of his hasty passage, but he seemed somehow different.

The immaculate soldier, the professional soldier, the man who took a pride in his iron emotions, his stoicism, had gone. Instead he had developed into something which Ken for one, was glad to see.

They sat on the wet ground beneath one of the shielding trees, the rain sending a dull murmur down through the broad leaves. Harrison, his eyes blazing with questions, Ken, watching, studying the flow of emotion across the haggard features, and sergeant Bob Foster, deserter extraordinary.

"Stop it," he pleaded. "For God's sake, stop it."

"Stop what?" snapped Harrison.

"The killing. The stupid senseless killing." Foster writhed in the grip of two men. "Stop it. Stop it, before it's too late!"

Harrison looked down at the man, his face iron hard. "They killed your companion," he reminded. "Killed Lassiter. Flung his head over the stockade. Do you know what you are asking?"

"Lassiter?" Foster grinned mirthlessly. "They didn't kill Lassiter. I watched him die. They didn't kill him. You did!"

"Tell me about it," Ken said quietly. "What happened after you left camp?"

Foster sighed, relaxing in the grip of his guards.

"I met a woman just after Lassiter had been flogged. I asked him about it, but he wouldn't tell me anything. Then I heard that he had gone, and I hated him for it." He bit his lower lip. "I was jealous I suppose, but I needn't have been. I saw her again, several days after Lassiter had gone. She seemed to want me to do something. The rest you know."

"We know that you left the compound," Ken said. "What did you do then?"

"Where is their village?" Harrison snarled. "When you deserted, where did they take you? Can you lead us to their village?"

"Shut up!" Ken snapped. "Leave this to me." He turned to Foster. "What happened after you left camp?"

"I couldn't sleep that night," Foster continued dully. "I felt restless; I hardly remembered getting up, getting dressed, leaving the compound. She was waiting for me. I touched her hand, the first time I had touched her—and then we were at their village."

"How do you mean?" questioned Ken. "Did you walk far? What is the village like?"

Foster shook his head. "I don't remember. All I know is that we were suddenly at a village. There were small conical huts scattered about the edge of a clearing. The woman led me to one, thrust me inside. Lassiter was there."

"Did they keep you prisoner?" Harrison snapped.

"No. Nothing like that. I thought that was it, at first, but I could leave the hut when I wished, go where I wished. I wasn't held in any way. They put food before the hut, great bowls of soft fruits, a root of some kind, gourds of water and something like a light wine. We fed well."

"Why didn't you return? What kept you there?"

"Lassiter. He was dying, and besides, I didn't want to leave."

"If Lassiter were dying, why didn't you return for help?" Ken eyed him shrewdly.

"I didn't think of it. I wanted to stay."

"Are you sure that Lassiter was dying?" Harrison asked bluntly.

Foster grimaced as if it hurt. "I saw his back. I saw the festering

sores, the inflamed wounds. I heard his moaning. I tried to help him, but what could I do? I couldn't strip off the plastic dressing; he screamed whenever I touched him. I tried to wash it off, but you need a solvent for that stuff. I just had to sit and watch him die. Sit and hear him cursing you between his screams." He looked down at his clenched hands.

"I was glad when he died."

"Why?" Ken asked gently.

"They had liked him, but they didn't care for me. They would come into the hut and look at him. Sometimes they would touch him gently; he seemed easier then, as if his pain had left him. I would sit in a corner and watch, and I envied him."

"What happened when he died?"

"They took him away. He began to smell a little, the heat and the rotting of his body—he was pretty far gone when he died—made it impossible to keep him there. I don't know what they did with him."

"And then?"

"I stayed. I hung around hoping that they would like me. They pulled down the hut; they stopped giving me food; they ignored me. It hurt."

He stared down at the wet soil. "They knew what you were doing. The woman came to me, touched my hand—and I heard the sound of the Vennors. I ran. I found you, and here I am." He looked at them, tears running down his cheeks.

"They sent me back, do you understand? They sent me back. Back to the *beasts!*"

Unashamedly he wept.

* * * * *

Harrison plodded grimly through the still streaming forest, Ken determinedly sticking at his side. The rain had eased, but still the trickling water from the great leaves cast a thin mist around them. Little sounds came from the rest of the garrison, but there was no more shooting.

"Have you analyzed Foster's story?" Ken asked.

Harrison grunted. "No. It's perfectly simple. When you have had the experience with deserters that I have, you will be able to see things in the proper perspective."

"And what is the proper perspective?" Ken asked drily.

"He ran away. He returned. He fears punishment. To avoid it, he invents a story. I've seen it happen a dozen times before."

"But why should he return?"

"He's an Earthman. Desperate for a woman as he was, he still retained some elements of decency. Lassiter's death must have shocked him into sanity. He probably remembered his wife, compared her to the animals he was associating with, and decided to return."

"He told the truth about one thing at least," Ken insisted. "Lassiter was dead when his head was removed. I tried to tell you that before. Coagulation of the blood in the main arteries proved that."

"It makes no difference." Harrison sounded stubborn. "They desecrated an Earthmen. They must pay."

"It seems a hard penalty," Ken protested. "Must you kill them without some attempt to understand their viewpoint?"

Harrison snorted impatiently. "Listen. I rescinded my orders to shoot everything on sight, only because the sound of the Vennors had obviously warned the natives. We must be somewhere near their camp. Foster proves that. I intend to surround the clearing—and wipe them out." He lifted one hand. "Save your breath, Drayton, and don't talk. If you think that you can warn them of our approach, you are mistaken. I give you fair warning; if you disobey my orders, you will suffer an accident in the fighting." He grinned savagely. "It would be very easy for someone to mistake you for a native, wouldn't it?"

Ken swallowed. He knew that Harrison meant every word of his threat. The man had thrown caution to the winds; he was hell bent on one object, and right or wrong he would carry it out. Extermination of the natives!

And there was nothing he could do to stop it. He had tried; he had persuaded; he had threatened. For awhile he had dared to hope, but all his science, all his skill, was impotent before the primordial blood lust of the average man. If it threatens you—kill it!

A simple creed. It had carried men on a tide of blood from a fear crazed animal crouching in a cave, to the very conquest of space. He had mastered his own world by that creed. He would master others, but it was the wrong way.

It had to be wrong. Intelligent races had to learn to live with

their neighbors—not destroy them. The cost was too great; the payment too severe. Nations, races, equally with individuals, could suffer from remorse. Guilt neurosis could be a terrible thing. It could drive men insane. It could drive an entire race the same way.

Something moved in the mist, just beyond clear vision. Harrison threw up a warning hand, gestured, men melted silently into the forest, the barrels of their weapons steady before them.

Ken felt a moment of panic. For one instant he thought of shrieking a warning. Harrison glared at him, the Vennor in his hands lifting in silent menace. His eyes were bloodshot, his features drawn and tense. He was no longer human.

Tension-taut nerves were near the breaking point. Tongues flickered across lips suddenly dry. Hearts hammered, fingers tightened on smooth metal triggers. Sight aligned on shadowy shapes moving steadily through the mist.

Harrison sighed, his breath hissing from between thin lips. The Vennor lifted to his shoulder, steadied, the finger commencing the lethal squeeze.

Ken choked, half lifted one hand, tried desperately to shout a warning. Something gripped his tongue. Something gripped his limbs, his muscles. Darkness rushed towards him. Through the dimming of his vision he could see the Vennor falling from Harrison's grasp. It fell on the soft loam, and Harrison collapsed beside the gleaming weapon.

Then blackness roared over him.

The rain had stopped. The sky showed the same clear mass of snowy clouds that he remembered—the sun, a great patch of golden light high above the horizon. A lizard stared at him with eyes that twinkled like little jewels, then ran swiftly up the bole of a giant tree.

A faint wind blew, stirring the great leaves, whispering softly through the tangled jumble of vines and overblown flowers. Insects hovered, droning with the beat of their shimmering wings; the heat of a new day pressed warmly around him.

He stretched, feeling the thick soft loam of the forest floor yield a little to the thrust of his muscles. He felt relaxed. At ease, physically and mentally. He turned his head.

Harrison smiled at him, his hands locked behind his head, legs stretched full length on the soft ground before him.

"Hello. I've been waiting for you to wake up."

Ken rolled over onto one side. "How long have we slept?"

Harrison shrugged, glancing at his wrist. "No idea. Watch has stopped. Not that it matters." He climbed lithely to his feet. "Coming?"

Ken nodded, rose reluctantly, fell into step beside Harrison. His foot struck against something hard. It was the Vennor, a trace of rust marring the smooth shine of the metal. Absently he picked it up.

"What are you going to do about Foster?" he said conversationally as they strode through the silent trees.

"Foster? Why nothing!" Harrison smiled ruefully. "Poor devil, he's already had his punishment. Think of it, to be so near, then to be rejected." He turned to the psychologist. "We must help him, Ken."

"Of course," Ken nodded. He took a deep breath of the humid air, savoring the delicate odors stemming from a host of growing things. "You know what's happened to us, I suppose?"

Harrison nodded.

"We were so blind," murmured Ken. "So foolishly blind. It was plain before us, yet we would not see."

"I was the one to blame," Harrison sounded almost ashamed.

"No. You are not to blame. If blame there must be, then blame your ancestors, your predecessors, the men that dwelt in caves and struck before trying to understand. We grew up with that heritage. We had to leave our world to find another."

"Talk to me," begged Harrison humbly. "You know about these things; tell me more."

Ken smiled. "Is it necessary? You know as much as I. But let us talk; it will make our journey shorter." He swung the Vennor idly in his hand. "How long would it take for a human to lose his pigmentation in a climate such as this? Ten thousand years? Twenty? Or perhaps it was the reverse, maybe it was we who gained pigmentation. Will we ever know?"

He mused a little.

"They must have looked upon Lassiter as we would a small helpless animal. He was sick; they fetched another of his own kind to tend him. He died. What could they do? He had to be buried; the climate makes that essential." He laughed a little. "It was really good of them to let his friends know that he had died. They choose

the most logical way, but then they are always logical. It was just that we didn't understand."

"And I wanted to kill them," murmured Harrison. "I wanted to kill everything that moved."

"They couldn't allow that, of course. When they realized what we were doing, they had to act. They sent Foster to us. He must have been a nuisance anyway, hanging around their village like a stray dog wanting someone to adopt him. They tried to dissuade him, but they couldn't turn him out."

"I wouldn't listen to him," said Harrison wonderingly. "Now it seems so strange."

"Foster failed," agreed Ken. "It wasn't really his fault—we were all insane."

"But now we're sane," breathed Harrison.

"Yes. It took very little. A slight mental adjustment—a little mental therapy—merely altering our point of view. A little thing, from their standards, but a great thing from ours."

They walked in silence, each busy with his own thoughts. The forest was no longer alien. The wild life no longer threatening. Ken felt a great awe. Would they ever be allowed to mingle with the Venusians on equal terms? Would they ever be able to reach the heights of mental adjustment that made weapons, cities, mechanical servants unnecessary?

He hoped so. Deep within him he knew that it would be so. Something tapped against his leg; he looked down. The rust-stained Vennor still swung from his hand. He looked at it distastefully. The open confession of man's weakness and fear, it was the end product of a long trail of hate and savage blindness. He flung it aside.

Before them the forest thinned, the faint trail of a well trodden path opening before them. The landing field came into sight, men busy clearing the fresh sprung riot of rain-induced growth.

Above their heads a bird wheeled, scaly-necked, leather-winged. It soared on fitful thermal currents, watching the scene below with curiously bright eyes. It flapped rustling wings, circled, and was gone.

Harrison looked after it smiling.

Already men were at work tearing down the stockade.

SCIENTIFILM PARADE

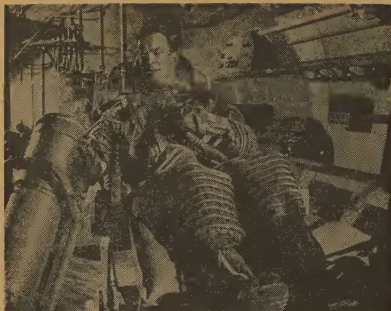
By FORREST J. ACKERMAN

SPACEWAY proudly presents its exclusive preview feature, written by the world's authority on science-fiction films. Mr. Ackerman, who has undoubtedly seen more motion pictures of fantasy than anyone else interested in the field, was recently called upon to help select and honor a number of directors, producers and technicians for their "outstanding historical contribution to the development of the Science Fiction Film." In Hollywood, California, on behalf of the ABC Radio Workshop "Think" Series and The Los Angeles Science-Fantasy Society, as Master of Ceremonies at ABC Studios Mr. Ackerman called onto the stage and congratulated, while handing them their Award plaques, such greats in the industry as Frank Capra, Fritz Lang, George Pal, Curt Siodmak, Ray Bradbury, Merian C. Cooper (by proxy Fay Wray), James "Frankenstein-Invisible Man" Whale (by proxy Mae Clarke), Byron Haskin, Leith Stevens, and several others. Mr. Ackerman was himself, at the eleventh World Science Fiction Convention, awarded a Hugo, the science-fiction field's equivalent of Hollywood's coveted Oscar.—*Editor.*

THE METEOR HUNTERS

Once again Curt Siodmak, who dates clear back to the July, 1926 *Amazing Stories*, which featured his "Eggs from Lake Tanganyika" on the cover, has scripted another stirring scientifilm. *RIDERS TO THE STARS* promises to be an even more memorable treat than his classic "FPI" or the later "TransAtlantic Tunnel" or recent hit, "Magnetic Monster." Like the latter, the picture has been produced by Ivan Tors, and the pair of men make a winning team. With excellent actor Richard Carlson, himself an early devotee of stf, completing the triangle, a top product is assured.

Riders to the Stars forecasts a possible preliminary step that may have to be taken on the road to the moon, the planets, and eventually outer space. Supposing even the toughest alloy, say vanadium, should prove inadequate to shield rockets from some invisible iron curtain



in the sky? Supposing, as in the picture, test rockets should hurtle heavenward at 18,000 miles an hour, only to repeatedly tumble back to earth—their structures crystallized.

Herbert Marshall, playing Dr. Donald Stanton, chief of operations at Rocket Proving Ground No. 4, calls together a number of his associates to discuss the catastrophes. His medical, biological and engineering consultants agree with his hypothesis that at the rockets' peak of 426 miles they are bombarded by an intense concentration of cosmic rays, which alter the molecular structure of the vanadium, making it brittle.

Question: would it be possible to devise a cosmic ray screen? Biggest question: of what substance?

Dr. Stanton sees a possible solution. He phones the Pentagon, contacts an agent of military intelligence, explains his need. A number of candidates for Operation Meteor are lined up.

In complete ignorance of what the Office of Scientific Investigation could possibly want of them, the young men report to the Snake Mountains proving grounds. Here, in ensuing days, they are subjected to a number of tests, both psychological and physiological. The psychological are surreptitiously performed, to test for claustrophobia, irritability, etc., while the physical call for superhuman endurance of heat, gravity and other travails of the Centrifuge. These "space cadet" type trials and techniques will undoubtedly be one of the visual highlights of the picture.

The candidates are washed out one by one until only Richard Carlson ("Jerry Lockwood"), Robert Karnes and William Lundigan, playing Dr. Stanton's son Richard, remain. Then the confidential plan is explained to them. It has been reasoned that since meteors travel through the depths of space for tremendous lengths of time, nakedly exposed to the corrosive cosmic rays, they must bear some natural shielding. But since this all-important substance, whatever it may be, is inevitably burned away by friction when meteors fireball through our atmosphere, it will be necessary to capture one "alive," as it were. The project is very simple: to go up and bring one back.

Just the thing for the red-blooded young American who is tired of life, liberty and the pursuit of Marilyn Monroe.

A suicide mission, to be frank about it.

But Dr. Stanton emphasizes: "If we're not the first nation that solves the problem of space travel, we'll have small chance of survival."



Quartet of stills show tense moments in Ivan Tors' costly production of Curt Siodmak's dramatic **RIDERS TO THE STARS**, technicolor triumph of rocketeers on a meteoric mission, starring Richard Carlson, Herbert Marshall and William Lundigan, and previewed on these pages by "Mr. Science fiction."

—"A-Men" Productions Photo

A bitter ex-candidate erupts: "Defense . . . war . . . killing! Every invention seems to have the same end!"

Stanton, patiently: "The exploration of space by us may mean the end of wars. A space platform operated by a dictatorship would make slaves of all free people.

But the skeptic still doubts: "The man who invented the bow and arrow probably gave his countrymen the same speech."

Leaving arguments of philosophy, however, Carlson, Lundigan and Karnes agree to risk their necks for mankind.

The plan is for three rockets to take off almost simultaneously, rise to a height of approximately 150 miles, edge up on a meteor at a speed slightly in excess of 18,000 mph, scoop it up and return to earth with the quarry.

Karnes is the first to spot a meteor. Calculations indicate it is too big a bite for the scooper, but Karnes recklessly attempts to capture his prey. In the process his ship is blown up, and when his horribly dehydrated, eyeless, skeletal remains (my wife stumbled across this realistic dummy lying discarded in the dark on the sound stage at the studio, and let out a supersonic shriek)—when the space ruptured remains of Karnes float past Carlson's vision, he goes to pieces, loses control of his rocket, and shoots out into space.

As this reviewer has a rather rigid policy against giving away the denouement of a picture if in so doing it will spoil the suspense for an audience, I will leave it to your imagination as to if and how the chase of the meteor is finally successful.

Suffice it to say that my prediction is, when this picture begins to play around the country, it will pile up plenty of the kind of metal that counts—silver—at the box office. And all indications are that it will win a gold medal of approval from the film-going segment of science fiction fandom.

In future issues of *Spaceway* I expect to present pictorial previews of "Gog and Magog," "Time of Terror," "This Island Earth," "The Humanoids," "Target—Earth!" "The Hunting Season," "The Martian Chronicles," "Secret of the Snow Men," "Steel Atlantis," and many others.

(Editor's Note: Studios, publicity departments, and independent producers interested in having on-the-set interviews or supplying stills and synopses for possible use in this department should contact Forrest J. Ackerman via the Beverly Hills phone book.

The REMARKABLE DINGDONG

By AUGUST DERLETH

Q J. Rufus Thwing Dingdong was tops as the editor of a science fiction magazine—but to the F.B.I. he was a great big pain in the neck.

HARRIGAN sat down beside me at McQuarrie's bar, pushed his hat back on his head, and looked at the magazine I was reading.

"*London Mystery Magazine*," he read. "That's a new one on me."

"It is new," I said.

He beckoned for the bartender and asked, "Did you ever hear of a magazine called *Remarkable Science-Fiction*?"

I said I had not. If I went in for pulp-fiction at all, I went in for the best.

"Take it easy," cautioned Harrigan. "It was pretty good stuff. There was nothing cheap or second-rate about *Remarkable Science-Fiction*. As a matter of fact, it was probably too good."

"Was?"

"It's gone. Together with its remarkable editor, J. Rufus Thwing Dingdong."

"My God! What a handle!"

"Fact," said Harrigan. "I looked up his baptismal certificate. There's no doubt about it. The J. stood for John. The boy was a brain, all right. Just the same, he was as odd as a penny-counterfeiter."

"Hold on," I said. "Editors can't afford to be that different."

"This one could. He gloried in it. He took over this magazine when it was wobbling around in a mass of pseudio-science and shot it full of genuine, honest-to-God science with its roots in the day

after tomorrow. He pushed up its circulation from ten thousand to seventy-five in six months, and after his atomic issue, it went over a hundred thousand. That's pretty good for a pulp magazine."

"Doesn't sound very odd to me," I said.

"Well, the odd part lay in him. The boy had ideas. He was the original idea-man in science-fiction. Never got a story in but what he had a different idea about it. Drove his authors crazy with his meddling, but, with one thing and another, he managed to ring the bell a good many times. But he had a quirk, if you'd call it that, and it got him into trouble with the government."

"Income tax?"

"Nothing as dull as that. He developed a genius for prophecy. He blossomed out on the stands one day with a story about the atomic bomb—three months before the first one went off at Los Alamos. The F. B. I. had him in tow twenty-four hours later, and of course the newspapers got wind of it. Very hush-hush, you know, but something for the files. I hightailed it over to his Fifth Avenue office and sat in. He was a high-domed young fellow, not bad looking, —just a regular guy with a moustache and too much education. He did a little writing himself, but it was pretty much on the pedestrian side—too much science, too much gimmick, too little story and people.

"I got in to see him after the F. B. I. were finished with their second or third round. He didn't look like a man who'd gone through an ordeal, though the author of the offending story looked pretty limp when I passed him on the way in.

" 'I haven't a thing to say to the press,' he said. 'The F. B. I. makes all the statements.'

" 'I'm not interested in the F. B. I.,' I answered. 'We've got a line direct to Edgar Hoover, anyway. What I want to know is how you do it?'

" 'Do what?'

" 'Prophesy.'

"I had him there. That touched the spot with him. I could see his antagonism wash off and a kind of personal pride in achievement take its place.

" 'It's just plain common sense,' he said. 'The atom bomb's just around the corner.'

" 'May I quote that?'

" 'Sure,' he said.

" 'And what else?

" 'What comes next, you mean? You might take a look at a project for a hydrogen bomb—a hundred times more terrific than the atom bomb. We'll have a story on it in our June issue, coming up in six weeks. Look up our files, and you'll find out we did it with radar, too, guided missiles, rockets, and so forth. I'll tell you the big thing, though—it's interplanetary travel. Bases on the moon—all that sort of thing.'

"You heard about those things; you read high-falutin' essays in high-falutin' magazines debating the possibility of such things, but you seldom got beyond that. Like speculation about life on other planets. You could find something of that nature in every issue of the *American Weekly* in the days of A. Merritt's editorial guidance, and even before. It went over big—a kind of sensation people never expected to experience, like all those tales of haunted castles in England. But Dingdong sounded as self-assured as a bank teller pointing out an error in your balance.

" 'You sound pretty matter-of-fact about all that,' I said.

" 'Why shouldn't I? I've been living with it for years.'

"He was pretty sure of himself.

" 'It's a cinch,' I said, 'the F. B. I. hasn't been living with it for any length of time.'

" 'You can't expect too much of the government,' he came back at me. 'We're trying to convert them to *Remarkable Science-Fiction*.'

"I wished him luck and took off. I figured I had a story I could use in the predictions he'd made. The F. B. I. angle was out, according to the office, for security reasons; but I went ahead with the story about his predictions. The paper had hardly hit the streets before the Hoover boys were hot on my trail. We had to jerk the story from all subsequent editions. That made me conclude that maybe Dingdong had something; so I took the first chance I got and went back to his office.

"He was in the middle of layout for the June issue.

" 'Listen,' I said, 'how do you know about the atom bomb?'

" 'Stands to reason,' he answered. 'Look, I've been thinking about such things for a long time. So have others. So have our authors. We've had stories in *Remarkable Science-Fiction* about atomic warfare before. This time we happened to hit the jackpot. They wanted us to withdraw the issue. We said, "Nothing doing!" and pointed out that that would be a tip-off to the enemy. They saw that.'

" 'But evidently the mechanics come close to fact,' I said.

" 'Sure. That's the thing I pride myself on—all the stories in *Remarkable Science-Fiction* are based on facts and more facts, and we emphasize the factual side of our stories. We don't go in for ghosts, vampires, and that rot. Just sound, solid science, which we extend along the obvious lines for stories set in the future. Can we put you down as a subscriber, Mr. Harrigan?'

" 'Sure,' I said. 'I'm game. Start with the next issue.' I bought the current one to read the atom bomb story. 'But tell me, do you sit around nights working these things out?'

" 'No,' he said, 'my subconscious mind works them out.'

" 'Your what?'

" 'That part of me that doesn't sleep. I wake up with those concepts pretty well laid out.'

" 'You dream them?'

" 'No. Subconscious mind. Different thing.'

"I took that in my stride. I had thought the subconscious was associated with the night life of the mind, and that most of the night life had something to do with sex. Apparently my mistake. He went on to elaborate, but it still boiled down to the fact that the finished product in each case—atom bomb, hydrogen bomb, moon bases—woke up with him some morning. He made it sound as scientific as a mechanical brain.

"Well, I figured I had enough for a routine story. 'Editor Gets Story Ideas in Sleep' or something like that. I wrote it and it was published about a week later. I took an early edition and went over to his office. He wasn't in yet, but he came in just after I had made myself comfortable, knowing he was due any moment. So I got the chance to see this boy operate. There was nothing slow about him. I doubt if he saw me.

"He came charging in and called to his secretary to get him Van Heingeon, and as soon as he had Van Heingeon on the wire, he let go. 'Van!' he said, 'get this. Biggest thing ever. I want it by four o'clock tomorrow afternoon. We're going to take Moscow with a kind of gas that makes automatons out of the people. Then we go down—we're immunized—and take the leaders in the Kremlin. I've got the formula for the gas worked out, and it'll be in your hands by messenger in an hour. I want about nine thousand words.'

"Then he bawled out to his secretary, 'Lisa, jerk half that Bil-

diuretics article from the next issue and make room for a new story by Van Heinegon.'

" 'Are we at war with Russia?' I asked.

" 'We are!'

" 'That's news to me,' I said.

" 'I mean of course, *Remarkable Science-Fiction*. We'll win with Thermidon, the new automaton gas.'

" 'I never heard of it,' I said.

" 'Of course not. I just invented it,' he said. 'It's the stuff, all right. It'll be the surprise weapon of this war, take my word for it.'

" 'And what in hell is Bilduretics?'

" He looked at me scornfully. 'You know what body cells are? Enzymes, hormones, so on?' he asked. 'Well, we've got etics, too. You've heard of Cybernetics and Dianetics. Now it's Bilduretics. The whole thing is that success in life, mental and physical health depends on controlling and mastering your own personal etics.'

" 'You're sure you don't mean ethics?'

" 'What have ethics got to do with science?' he asked coldly.

" 'I couldn't answer that one. 'So this is how you work!' I said.

" 'This isn't all. Van will have that story in my hands by tomorrow morning. He'll make the changes by late afternoon. He'll have our check next morning and *Remarkable Science-Fiction* will have another beat over our competition. Do you ever hear of *Thrilling Astonishing Stories*, *Interstellar Tales*, or *Uncanny Tales*? No, you don't. Do they get themselves into the papers? Not by a long shot. And why? I could tell you in one word.'

" 'Dingdong,' I said.

" 'Right,' he answered. 'Lisa,' he raised his voice again, 'we'll call the story *Thermidon I*. Make the contents page change.'

" With that off his mind for the rest of the day, he relaxed. He was a pretty decent sort of guy, once you got to know him, and not as vain as he sounded. He just knew, that was all; and he was impatient with those people who were slower than he was. Now it was Thermidon; he had worked it all out in his sleep—a gas that did strange things to people, not paralyzed them, nothing like the old paralyzing-ray stuff, but took initiative and will power and judgment away from them and made them—well, slaves, to anyone using the gas against them. It could be made permanent or temporary in its effect.

" I could see the story he had in mind. Fleets of Thermidon-

bearing aircraft making it possible to kidnap the politburo and force an end to any war. Good, timely stuff. It was set for the July issue, because the June was on press and would soon be out. Well, I sat around talking things over with him for quite awhile. He was just about the brainiest fellow I ever knew, particularly in things scientific; he knew more of the answers than I thought any one fellow could know.

"I ended up by showing him my story. He didn't like it, and spent a little time trying to show me the difference between sleeping and the subconscious mind. I got the drift finally, but it was too late to save the story.

"That was the last I heard about him for a few more weeks. Then the June issue of *Remarkable Science-Fiction* hit the stands, and all hell broke loose. That story built around the hydrogen bomb was hotter than the air lift over Berlin. It was by a fellow named Spragsimov Pouldersen, and it was a whale of a story—oh, nothing literary about it, just action and science with some robots and people, or people and robots, if you like it that way. Within twenty-four hours every issue of *Remarkable Science-Fiction* had disappeared from the stands—most of them withdrawn, and Pouldersen had been picked up for questioning. He relayed the F. B. I. to Dingdong; it had been another of Dingdong's concepts, and he had merely written it to order. Spragsimov Pouldersen was a young nuclear physics teacher at Columbia, and he was as innocent as a goldfish; the only pronounced ideas he had were limited to an antipathy for literature. But Dingdong was another matter entirely.

"By the time the F. B. I. moved in on Dingdong, that remarkable young man had vanished. Nobody knew where he was. His fiancée, his parents, his publisher,—no one. He had set out for the office that morning and just stepped off into space. Well, of course, the first reaction was that he had decamped. His publisher had another notion; he issued a statement that the competition in the science-fiction publishing field was trying to buy him and had kidnapped him. All the competitors issued statements denying every charge categorically and adding that they wouldn't have Dingdong on a platter.

"It was a two-day wonder, and the funniest part of it was that Dingdong had been kidnapped, all right, and there wasn't a thing anybody could do about it. Diplomatic immunity—one of those old shibboleths lived up to by the democracies and always violated by

the anti-democracies. He had been picked up by the Russian ambassador and invited in for a 'discussion'. They asked him so many questions he couldn't recall them all. Most of all, they wanted to know about the hydrogen bomb, of course; that issue of *Remarkable Science-Fiction* had reached them, all right; the consul at New York was a subscriber; he had got on to the ambassador, who had flown up from Washington, and that little group of Russians had a two-day parley with J. Rufus Thwing Dingdong.

"Dingdong insisted that he had been treated with every courtesy. He had learned a great deal from the Russians, as well. In fact, he had an idea brewing at the moment which involved a drug which would effect a profound character change in any given individual. Think of turning a Russian cossack into a dove of peace! All in all, Dingdong had given them as good as they had given him, and he looked on the whole episode as in the nature of a lark. Besides, it won for *Remarkable Science-Fiction* the best publicity the magazine had ever had. The circulation doubled overnight, and his happy publisher gave Dingdong a twenty percent increase in salary with a bonus for every time he ran a story which got *Remarkable Science-Fiction* a set number of lines of free publicity.

"The F. B. I., however, wasn't happy. Their agents growled and grumped and continued to be suspicious. Dingdong had simply liked the Russians too much, either as *opera bouffe* figures or as genuine human beings. They were suspicious of what Dingdong might have given away without knowing for sure what Dingdong had to give away, and they were puzzled besides over what was hush-hush and what was not, because a lot of things they were hushing up were common knowledge, and you couldn't arrest someone for repeating what had appeared in print.

"The only statement Dingdong made was this: 'Wait for the next issue of *Remarkable Science-Fiction*. It will be the most startling of all.' That was quite a prediction for a magazine which had had a stock in trade of robots, mechanical brains, surgical monstrosities, interplanetary travel, worlds outside, atomic warfare, and the like. The boys from the F. B. I. were anything but satisfied. For one thing, they figured Dingdong was giving away government secrets, giving comfort to the potential enemy, and generally playing hob with national security. Now, it was plain to see that Dingdong wasn't doing anything of the sort; he was just different enough to

have a trait or a quirk that was a gold-mine for *Remarkable Science-Fiction*, and he was driving it to the limit.

"Well, they demanded and got a look at the galleys for the July issue—all but the story by Van Heingeon, which hadn't been put through as yet. They were pretty dubious about the Bilduretics article, took it apart, and looked at it for evidence of codes and ciphers; but of course there wasn't anything to be found, which made them more suspicious than ever. They kept the office of *Remarkable Science-Fiction* under surveillance for awhile longer, they badgered Pouldersen and Dingdong, and then they gave it up.

"I finally got in to see Dingdong. He was beaming like a Cheshire cat.

"'Listen,' he said, 'I couldn't buy publicity like this. Have you seen our circulation figures?'

"I had and said so. They were impressive.

"We're out to make the English-speaking world—to begin with—*Remarkable Science-Fiction* conscious. After that we'll adopt the *Reader's Digest* plan for foreign-language editions, if we can overcome the initial hurdle of better payment for our authors.'

"'Well, after all, so many of the stories are your ideas,' I said.

"'There is that,' he conceded, without turning a hair.

"'And what would the magazine be without your subconscious?' I asked. 'After all, you could have one like Dali—filled with limp watches. Wouldn't do a thing for *Remarkable Science-Fiction*.'

"He conceded the point.

"By and by the furore died down. People forgot about *Remarkable Science-Fiction* and got to thinking about the next phase of the struggle with Russia. There were voices urging us to attack without other provocation than we had already had, but sager counsels prevailed. It was all this talk about Russia, however, that set the stage for the July issue of *Remarkable Science-Fiction*."

I interrupted to push another drink toward him. "I don't see how he got onto those things," I said. "It takes competent scientists years to work one of them out."

"That's what made him remarkable," said Harrigan. "He conceived something in future science, turned it over to his subconscious, and one day he woke up with it all worked out, ready to be put to work. I don't pretend to explain it. I started out by figuring him a hoax; but if he was, he was too perfect for his own good. The fact is, his magazine came out with leading military secrets in the guise

of fiction, and he was perfectly willing to take all the credit or blame.

"Could be the atom bomb story set him off. In any case, the progress of *Remarkable Science-Fiction* was meteoric from the April issue through July. From the atom bomb to the hydrogen bomb to thermidon in four issues."

"Why stop there?" I asked.

Harrigan grinned. "After the July issue, the magazine was suppressed."

"What for?"

"Well, believe it or not, the government had carefully kept under wraps just such a wild scheme as Dingdong had had Van Heingeon write about in his story, *Thermidon I*, in case of an attack by Russia. And here was a magazine purporting to be fiction giving the whole show away, even to rough notes out of which anyone could have figured the formula for Thermidon. Truth is stranger than fiction, and you might say science-fiction is stranger than fact. Anyway, the magazine wasn't out more than a few hours before the F. B. I. blew into town with the air of an outraged father ready to take a prominent part at a military wedding.

"Right off, all available issues of the July *Remarkable Science-Fiction* were confiscated and destroyed, except for all the data pertinent to *Thermidon I*, which was shipped down to Washington. Van Heingeon was put under arrest and hustled off to Washington, too, though they released him later on, as soon as they found out that, just as they had suspected, Dingdong was the idea man who had ordered the story.

"I had had a hunch something like that would happen, so I had got up to Dingdong's apartment as soon as I had read *Thermidon I*, and got an interview.

" 'That's nothing,' said Dingdong. 'Wait till you see the next issue. All about Pyromidon—it's terrific! We'll triple our circulation.' "

" 'Just supposing,' I said, 'the government's got something like this stuff, Thermidon. What then?' "

" 'It'll be plagiarism.' "

" 'On whose part?' "

" 'On theirs, of course. Some of those fellows will have been snooping around the office and caught sight of Van's story; that's all.' "

" 'It doesn't occur to you that they might have developed it on

their own, like the atom bomb and the hydrogen bomb, and that they might suspect somebody's been leaking military secrets to you?"

" 'They'd have to prove that,' he said, confidently.

" 'Okeh,' I said. 'What's Pyromidon?'

" 'It's revolutionary. The minute they turn it on, every cog and wheel stops dead. Every motor stops; all the machinery in the radius of the ray is out, *kaput*, done for—the cars, locomotives, dynamos—all washed up.'

" 'I see,' I said, somewhat apprehensively.

" 'But what am I telling you all this for, Harrigan? You can't use it in the paper, chances are, and you're a subscriber. Watch for it in our August or September issue.'

"Of course, there wasn't going to be an August or September issue, but neither of us knew that then. He was still going on about his coming concept, trying to select an author to write it for him, when the 'phone rang. It was his office calling.

" 'What? Confiscating the issue?' he cried. 'They can't do that to us.'

"He slammed down the 'phone, grabbed his hat, and ran out of his apartment.

"And that was the last of J. Rufus Thwing Dingdong."

"What happened?" I asked.

"There were several stories about that," said Harrigan, signalling for another whiskey and soda. "Of course, the most popular one was that the Russians had simply kidnapped him again, figuring he could be useful to their government, and had spirited him out of the country to Russia, where he is presumably living happily ever after, having his dreams and stories and editing the Soviet counterpart of *Remarkable Science-Fiction*. But the only Russian angle was a formal protest against such stories made by the Russian Ambassador in Washington, and another laid before the United Nations Council by the Soviet Delegate; they do all those things dead pan, you know, and you can never correctly estimate the weight attached to any one protest, since diplomacy to those boys is something different from what we understand by the word."

"All right," I said. "What really happened?"

"He could have taken it on the lam," Harrigan went on. "That was another theory. But there were all sorts of theories, one after the other; they popped up in all the newspapers. And presumably

the F. B. I. were still looking for Dingdong even after the publisher of *Remarkable Science-Fiction* had announced the suspension of the magazine.

"What actually happened, however, was quite different. It shouldn't have been entirely unforeseen. The F. B. I. had picked him up as he rushed out of his apartment, whisked him into a car, and had him in Washington before you could bat an eye. What took place there might easily have been foreseen, too; since the government had a plan involving the paralyzing of Moscow with something like Thermidon, all highly hush-hush, of course, and here it was in a magazine edited by a man who had already jumped the gun on two other military secrets. They had to make tracks in a hurry. They gave him a secret military trial. There were some people who wanted to see him executed for treason, but there was a preventive legal technicality; since we weren't actually at war, the most he was doing was revealing military secrets to a potential enemy. One or two influential men wanted to declare war and make it legal, but they were in the minority.

"Dingdong got twenty years. I understand on good authority that he worked himself up to the editorship of the prison magazine, a monthly called *Uplift Stories*."

.... FUTURE FARE

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE, we will present the first instalment of a new novel by E. Everett Evans, "Stairway into Mars," which deals with the hardships of the first earth colonists on Mars.

Complications arise from the beginning, for the colonists soon learn that conditions are not what they had been led to believe. They realize they've been stranded with practically no food or water—and with little hope of obtaining more.

The Martian terrain depicted in this novel is that which is generally believed to be correct for our neighboring planet. The colonists are subjected to the terrible cold, the thin atmosphere, the arid desert, and the paucity of water and plant life. But they also encounter many surprises on this wornout world.

There will also be an unusual and exciting novelet by Arthur J. Burks, a goodly number of short stories—and Forrest Ackerman's interesting column on the latest science fiction films.

The Smuggler

By JIM HARMON

¶ We are all familiar with the adage: "You can't see the forest for the trees"—but how would it apply in the space lanes of the future?

MARSHAL ZACK HENSHAW maneuvered his spaceship alongside the other rocket. He dropped one of his big hands from the control board to the audio switch.

"Jetsome Judson," he said in a flat gruff voice, "this is Marshal Henshaw of the Space Patrol. Prepare yourself for contact. I'm coming aboard!"

"Sure, Marshal, sure," came the high squeaky sound of Judson's voice.

At the acknowledgment Henshaw promptly cut off the audio and made for the escape hatch. Briskly he donned his spacesuit, while the magnetic force of the automatic controls drew the two ships together. As the clang of the contact rang in his ears, Henshaw stepped into the inner air-lock. There he pressed another switch and huge pumps began sucking the air in the lock back into the ship. Shortly the outer circular door swung silently back and Henshaw clambered through.

His magnetized iron boots rang loudly as he walked around the circular bulk of his ship. With scarcely a glance at the diamond-strewn black velvet of the void around him, he stepped expertly from one curving hull to the other, proceeded to the other ship's air-lock and through it. Once inside the other rocket he waited until he could no longer hear the hiss of the air being pumped into the vacuum. Then he threw back his plastibubble helmet and entered the main part of the ship to face a very much perturbed little man.

"Judson, I won't waste words. I never do. You're a smuggler.

I know it and you know it. So does everyone else, for that matter. You've always been a smuggler—probably always will be. You've spent most of your life on the prison satellites for smuggling, but that won't stop you—nothing will! The psychos haven't been able to do a thing with you. But since you got out this time, the SP can't find out what you're smuggling, though we've certainly tried hard enough!"

Judson sniffled. "Why can't you leave me alone, Marshal? You guys have gone over the ship every trip before I hit Mars. You've checked and doubled-checked. You never find anything, but still you keep hounding me."

Fire leaped into the Marshal's eyes. "Yes, we've checked. We analyzed the paint on your bulkheads to see if it didn't contain Venusian Dream-Dust. We've examined all your books and charts to see if they didn't have military secrets hidden in them. We took your ship apart looking for aliens you might be going to land on Mars. We even checked the outside of your hull for moisture to see if it didn't have a film of Jovian Joy Juice clinging there. We inspected you and your ship atom by atom and we found *nothing*."

"And still you keep hounding me!" Judson wailed.

Henshaw's teeth flashed. "And I will until I find out what it is. Nobody ever let me get away with anything, so why should I let you?"

Henshaw pulled a knife. Judson backed off in alarm.

"Oh, don't worry," reassured the Marshal. "I'm just going to do a little investigation on my own. I never did trust those scientists. But then I never trusted anybody."

Moments later, Henshaw, stood amidst upholstery torn to shreds, luggage broken and clothes scattered. He was breathing hard and there was a radiation burn on his hand where he had examined the power drive.

"Marshal, you can't find anything if the lab boys couldn't. Give it up. The next thing you'll be tearing up the control board."

Henshaw turned. "You wouldn't want me to tear up the control board, eh?"

"No, of course not. You'd wreck—oh, no . . . oh, no . . . you can't!"

"Ah-ha!" said the Marshal in triumph.

Desperately the small man threw himself at Henshaw. The Marshal sent him to the floor with one blow of his huge fist.

"You wouldn't be crazy enough to draw on me? No, I thought not."

Henshaw pried off the front of the control board with his knife. He reached in and pulled out wires with his gloved hands. Sparks flew and the smell of ozone filled the air.

"Hmm," said the Marshal at length. "There's nothing here but wires and gears and—"

"You've ruined the controls," wailed Judson from the floor. "We'll crash!"

"You whimpering fool," said Henshaw contemptuously. "My ship is still locked to yours. I can go to it and tow you in." He added, "The Space Patrol always tries to be of service."

"Too late," Judson continued to wail. "Look behind you!"

Henshaw turned to the indicated porthole and saw a craggy asteroid rushing in toward them.

The crash came with a violent lurch and a blinding flash and blackness. When Henshaw and Judson regained consciousness, they quickly established that both ships were damaged beyond repair and that all transmission equipment had been wrecked.

Spacesuited, the Marshal and Judson sat on a rocky projection on the planetoid's surface.

"It's hopeless," said Henshaw. "Hopeless, because routine patrol will never find us before our oxygen gives out—and we can't radio for help. We're doomed!"

Judson nodded miserably.

"You see where your sins have led you, Jet," the Marshal unbent slightly. "You should have told me what you were managing to slip by the Space Patrol." He leaned forward eagerly. "It will do you no harm now. Come on, tell me."

Judson's nose twitched uncontrollably.

"Aw, come on, tell me," Henshaw encouraged.

Judson leaned his head forward so his twitching nose pressed against his plastibubble helmet. He rubbed it back and forth, leaving a trail of moisture, and sighed. He turned so that his washed-out blue eyes were, for the first time, staring directly into the stern ones of the Marshal.

"Rocketships," he said simply.

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HYBRID ENIGMA

A NOVELET

By MAX SHERIDAN

To stay in the city was certain death—but beyond was a planet of living nightmares!

ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL BLAISDELL

DR. NEIL HAYDEN kicked viciously at the clod of red clay, watched it roll over the edge of the precipitous cliff. He didn't see it splatter on a ledge below, for the light of the setting sun was thin and wan. Tiny Phobos, already high in the evening sky, didn't appreciably help to dispel the vague mystery of the jagged terrain which descended abruptly into the dusk.

It had been a long and tortuous climb up the precarious trails from the broad valley. And before that it had been a gruelling trek through the swirling red sands from Martropolis to the base of the rugged mountain range.

Far across the desert, quiet in the hush of evening, he could faintly see lights pinpointing the city from which they had come. —Rather, from which they had been ejected!

The muscles tightened across Hayden's broad chest. His blue eyes smouldered darker in memory of inhumane humanity. It was the same old story that followed in inevitable sequence wherever bigoted and selfish men met an obstacle to their greed.

He kicked at another clod. Then, with a shrug that dismissed such reaction as puerile, he turned back toward the camp where fires licked fitfully at the gloom, casting dancing wraiths of light into the shadows where a dozen tiny tents cowered from the vast unreality of the plateau.

Sudden commotion shattered the dusk. A woman's scream rose thin and clear. Male shouts and the scuffing of thick-soled boots told of frantic action. A harsh voice screamed a frenzied warning:

"Kela, look out!"

Ten-foot leaps powered by Hayden's earthly muscles carried him



to the circle where the campfires valiantly fought the blanketing dusk.

Then he saw the creature which crouched over a motionless human shape. It was sickeningly anthropoid in outline, and the low gutturals it mouthed were almost semantically lucid.

"A Gethlone!" Hayden's heart was suddenly sick. Was that still form Kela? The vibrant and piquant loveliness of the Martian girl forever ended?

Automatically he snatched his weapon from its holster, leaped toward the center of the circle. No. He couldn't fire from this angle. The explosive pellet would kill the girl, if she were not already dead!

He edged warily around the gargantuan monster, trying for an opening. But the sentient beast wheeled slowly, then snatched up the silent form and bounded between the sickly fires into the lurking dusk.

"You fool! Why didn't you shoot?"

Hayden turned, slowly surveyed the ruggedly handsome but contorted features of the man who confronted him.

"You should know why, Sarn," he said quietly. He understood the other's irrational criticism. Sarn thought the world of his foster sister, and it was more than an affilial affection.

"Better that she die now than be torn apart by the Gethlone!" Sarn returned bitterly.

Hayden shook his head. "If she isn't already dead, the beast won't kill her. Have you forgotten?"

Marl Landron, Kela's father, stepped between them. His face seemed shrunken, sphinxlike, and his eyes were inscrutable ebony.

"Dr. Hayden is right, Sarn. Our task is to find the Gethlone's lair. What do you propose, Neil?"

Hayden hesitated. "How did it happen? Why didn't the beast's mental aura warn you?"

"Must be a 'Gethlonis Superioris,' " the old man returned. He paused, shook his head. "They're capable of emitting an euphoriant and analgesic mental wave. We didn't suspect a thing until it was among us."

Hayden nodded. "Sarn, you take Malin and Ornis and scout the section north of camp. Use infra-red head lamps and goggles, and dose yourselves with 'hypnotant' before you leave." The Earthman looked questioningly at Marl Landron.

The elderly Martian nodded. "I want you to take charge, Neil."

"All right. Marl, you and Zeni take the section to the west and south to the cliff's edge. Yaldin, you and Canil cover the eastern sector in the same way. Azil and I will search the face of the cliff for caves. Veldar, you stay with the women. All of you take a dose of 'hypnotant' and keep your guns ready."

In a few moments all had taken a swallow of the acridly bitter hypnotic which dulled the thalamic receptors to outside mental influence. They adjusted their infra-red head lamps, donned goggles and went their designated ways.

Hayden led the way to the cliff's edge, the slender Martian close at his heels. In silence they sought the crevice where they had so laboriously gained the edge of the plateau during the day.

Now, in the turgid gloom, the crevasses and crags loomed darkly, threatening a thousand pitfalls and dangers. Phobos, Mars' nearer moon, swam almost visibly from west to east, but its pale mysterious light merely silhouetted the spires and pinnacles. Only where the infra-lamps sent their cavorting beams was there anything lucidly visible.

"If only those Martropolis Earth-hypocrites had at least let us bring a 'Synaptibeam,'" Hayden said bitterly. "But no. They are afraid of anything that smacks of neural influence in the hands of the 'Patriots.' They turn us out with nothing but primitive pellet guns to cross half a world of wild and rugged country!" He picked his way slowly among the jagged crags, watching intently.

"And hope that we don't," agreed his Martian companion. "They'd like to have murdered us outright, but they'd have had even my mild and decadent countrymen to cope with. This was easier and safer—for them!"

Now they were in a deep crevasse, picking their way down toward a rugged rib which jutted out from the wall of the precipice. Moments later they were working their way along its uneven crest.

Out toward the end, they paused, turned toward the precipitous cliff, intently searching its pitted and creviced face under the light of their infra-lamps. Hayden shook his head. There were a million nooks and crannies. Any of them might widen into a recess in the rock wall.

"We've got to find her!" The Earthman jerked his head to and fro with frantic impatience, following the beam with quivering intensity. "It's almost the season for Gethlone parturition, and if those horrible little offsprings start on Kela—"

"I'm not a scientist, Doc," Azil reminded him. "I've heard tales of the strange beasts, but all I know is that they have a brain section which can send out hypnotic waves."

Hayden shuddered. "It's a great deal worse than that. The beasts aren't mammals, although they faintly resemble an Earthly gorilla. They're a type of primitive marsupial-like form peculiar to Mars. They bring forth their young alive, like the marsupials, but the little monsters are infinitely more numerous and even less mature. —Almost microscopic in size, and definitely embryonic in structure, except for taloned upper limbs and precocious mandibles."

Azil held up a thin, corded hand. He directed his light beam up and to the left of where they stood.

"What was that?" he whispered. Hayden strained his eyes trying to pierce the concealing gloom. Then he saw a flicker of movement. Something had sought cover in a dim recess where a rocky corner blocked the beam.

Slowly they worked their way back along the ridge, over to a narrow ledge, and along its precarious shelf to a spot just under the opening in the cliff. It was a good dozen feet above them, and there wasn't a niche in the smooth face sufficient for a hand-hold.

"Can you boost me up?" Azil asked the Earthman. Hayden shook his head.

"We couldn't possibly reach it. Anyhow, it's my job."

He edged around cautiously as far toward the brink as possible, scrutinized the ledge above in the light of the infra-beam.

"No!" Azil's whisper was vehement. "Even *you* couldn't make that jump! Let's try to approach it from above."

Hayden's voice was harsh. "Can't," he said. "It's a sheer face that only a Gethlone could manage. I'll have to try this." He cleared his throat.

"Hold your weapon ready," he said. Then, crouching low, he called on every ounce of earthly vigor in his bunched muscles, sprang for the ragged ledge.

On Earth it would have been an utterly impossible feat. Even here on Mars where Hayden's Earth-normal muscles had a more than two-to-one advantage, it was a pitifully long chance.

He heard Azil gasp as his outstretched fingers grasped at the jagged rock. One hand caught a projecting rib. It came loose in his fingers and brought a shower of dust and particles down into his eyes.

The other hand scraped painfully along the jagged rock, shredding the skin on his clutching fingers. Then his frantically searching fingers found a crevice, and held.

He heard Azil let out a deep breath as he found a hold with the other hand and slowly drew himself up to the questionable safety of the ledge.

Ahead of him yawned a shoulder-high opening into the cliff, and Hayden caught the stench of filth and rotting flesh. Almost certainly it was the lair of a Gethlone.

Cautiously he crept ahead, searching the opening with the infralight which was invisible to the eyes of the Gethlone. The stench increased, and Neil held his breath in nausea.

Ahead, dimly, he saw that the opening widened to a larger cavern, and he searched anxiously for a sign of the Gethlone. But there was nothing yet. No sound.

Wait, there was a rustling over in one corner of the cavern chamber. A soft sound like many mice.

He edged his way along one wall to a point where his light partially illuminated the corner. He gasped.

He could see a dim shape of roughly human outline. As he watched, he caught a slight movement of the figure on the floor. Saw it twitch!

Quickly he directed the light beam around the chamber, saw no signs of the Gethlone. The stench became almost unbearable as he picked his way across the rocky floor.

His stomach cramped at the sight of half-eaten, putrescent carcasses and gnawed bones which littered the place. Some of them looked faintly as though they might once have been human!

But that form across the cave in a rocky alcove was the thing of importance! Could it be Kela? —Alive?

It seemed an eternal march across the floor between those ghastly things that stank. It seemed even that they multiplied in his path!

At last he leaned close over the crumpled figure, tugged at its clothing. Cloth pulled loose in his hand. He stared down, utter horror jerking at his nerves with puppet strings!

On the ledge below the cavern, Azil waited in silence for the return of the Earthman. His usual Martian stolidity was still shaking slightly from the suspense of Hayden's leap.

The calm of the night seemed completely at variance with the

stress of circumstances. Far below him the vagueness of the tortuous ridges and buttresses appeared to be brightening to harsher, clearer outlines.

He glanced toward the eastern sky, saw a second pale orb adding its tenuous light to Phobos'. Deimos was rising, contributing to the intermittent phenomenon when Mars' two moons both presided in the darkling sky.

In the added visibility, the rim of the cliff above him etched a clear line against the night, and he searched its length for some way which might be used from above to follow Hayden.

There was none, at least which a man might follow. He listened intently for any sound from above, where Neil had disappeared. But the night held only those vague tenuous sounds which are forever enigmatic to mortal men.

Then above and an hundred feet to the right, a shape loomed large and ebon on the edge of the cliff. Azil studied its outline assiduously.—If it were a man, he mustn't shoot.

But the huge shape turned suddenly, and the Martian recognized familiar and hideous anthropomorphic characteristics. He jerked his pellet-gun up, aimed at the hulking silhouette, started to squeeze the trigger, then hurriedly released the pressure.

For, as the figure turned further toward the light of the two moons, Azil saw that the middle pair of the Gethlone's grasping tentacles held a form which he knew must be that of Kela!

Back in the necrotic stench of the fearsome den, Hayden stared down at the body on the rocky floor. Beads of perspiration appeared on his face.

It was the body of a man. Or part of the body of what had been a man. Oh yes, it was still alive—or nearly so.

But it wouldn't be for long, for the tiny, livid Gethlone young were burrowing their way rapidly toward vital organs. And then, not even the hypnotic lethargy induced by the parent Gethlone could longer keep life from leaving the ravaged husk.

Hayden shuddered, almost retched. He remembered a strikingly similar Earthly parallel. He remembered the vicious Eumenidae wasps which paralyze caterpillars with a sting, then lay their eggs, to hatch into voracious grubs in the dormant but living body.

He turned away, wondering as he did, what poor prospector it might have been whose body served as living food for the vicious

embryonic Gethlone young; hating with a terrible hatred this hideous species of an alien world.

A frantic cry from outside brought him from his shocked lethargy; sent him bounding out the cavern entrance.

"Neil!" Azil's scream broke the brooding night, echoed and reechoed with a thousand harsh voices from the myriad faces of the buttresses and crags. "Neil, she's coming!—The Gethlone's climbing down!"

Hayden looked up, saw the dark bulk limned against the somber red of the cliff, saw the alien monster clambering like a bloated spider down the smooth face. And in two of its tentacular limbs it held a body. Kela's!

The Earthman's mind raced along a thousand pathways. He couldn't shoot now. He couldn't wait until the Gethlone reached the ledge. He couldn't—

Wait, there might be a way! Frantically he searched for a crevice in the wall above his head, found one. He drew his knife from its sheath, pulled himself up, found another niche for a foot.

There he hung, plastered against the sheer wall. He waited breathlessly until the prehensile phalanges of the Gethlone's lower limbs appeared directly above him, seeking for supporting niches. Then he swung the double-edged knife with all his strength.

He heard an answering roar of pain. Hot liquid splattered his upturned face. He swung again at the monster's other lower limb, then dropped swiftly back to the rocky ledge.

The Gethlone bellowed in frightful hurt and anger at the top of its mighty lungs, and its half-severed lower limbs hung useless.

But still it held its burden, handicapped as it was, crawling slowly and painfully down toward the ledge.

Hayden waited in tense preparedness, gun in one hand and knife in the other. He had to handle this exactly right!

He bided his time until the Gethlone's back was within reach, then drove the knife to the hilt. The beast squalled its pain and rage, dropped sprawling to the ledge. It released its burden, turned on the Earthman with gaping maw and frightful fangs, screaming its defiance and hate.

Hayden dared not shoot yet, for Kela's body lay just behind his foe. He waited tensely while the Gethlone tried to stand, then roared in anguish and came at him on its four stout upper limbs.

Warily Hayden waited until it was almost upon him, then he

raised his gun, pulled the trigger. The bullet plowed into the hideous body; exploded with a violence that toppled the loathsome monstrosity over the brink of the ledge to plunge to the depths below.

"Neil!" came a frightened hail from below. "Neil—are you all right?"

Hayden reached for breath, straightened his knees.

"Okay," he said. "I'm okay." Then he bounded toward the limp form on the ledge.

"Thank Hala for that!" came Azil's fervent answer. "Is Kela hurt?"

Neil didn't answer. He took the girl in his arms, felt for her pulse.

Her eyes opened. She looked up.

"I'm all right," she said faintly.

Hayden's taut muscles relaxed. Now that the hypnotic control of the strange beast was gone, she would recover rapidly.

"Azil," he called. "Get some rope from camp and let it down on us."

An hour later, the group stood around Kela at the edge of the plateau. The women took over, swathed her in blankets, poured cups of hot Martian 'seвра' down her throat, and bundled her off to bed. She protested, but had to wave her thanks to Neil.

The Earthman turned aside Marl Landron's fervent thanks, Sarn's heartfelt praise, and the congratulations of the rest.

"Mainly luck and the help of 'Hala'," he said.

"Either 'Hala' or your Earthly 'God' may have helped," said Marl. "But we have a saying on Mars that: 'Hala oils the wheels, after they've been set spinning'."

The next morning the battle of the travelers against a rugged and hostile world began anew. Twice during the night the guards had fired at Gethlone; guards rendered immune to the hypnotic aura by proper dosage with "Hypnotant."

It seemed that this particular area abounded with the alien beasts, and Hayden knew that at least one reason was the myriad of caves honeycombing the cliffs. Another was its value as a vantage point for attacking the prospectors and hunters who occasionally dared the "Valine Plateau."

"Hi!" said Neil, looking up as Kela walked over rather shakily to join him by the fire. "How do you feel?"

"Fine!" she said. "At least, I'm alive, thank's to you."

"Feel like traveling a little? I'd like to get at least fifteen or twenty miles away from here by nightfall."

"I know," she returned, cinching the broad belt around her which held her pellet gun, knife, and antidotes for common venoms. "I'll be all right."

The Earthman admired the way the wide leather belt set off the girl's trim waist and very human feminine charms.

"I'd better help with the packing," she said. "I'll see you soon."

Hayden watched her go. She certainly didn't look like a Martian had been fancifully supposed to look, in pre-colony days. But then, neither did any Martian. They looked completely and normally "Homo Sapiens," but the somehow disquieting fact remained that they were actually a different species!

"Homo Martianis," the anthropologists termed them.

Neil remembered almost the exact wording of "Solar Anthropological Cultures":

"'Homo Martianis' has evolved on Mars in nearly perfect parallelism to the Earthly evolution of 'Homo Sapiens.' In fact, the primitive forebears of 'Homo Martianis,' according to paleontological evidence, bear such a thorough similitude to the 'Cromagnon,' 'Pithecanthropus,' and other ancient progenitors of 'Homo Sapiens' that it leads one to the inevitable conclusion of the 'Universality of Life.'

"It lends itself to the almost unanimous acceptance by scientific minds that life has evolved along almost identical channels, wherever, it may have arisen.

"Indeed, it would seem to support the 'Spore Theory' of planetary-inoculation with protoplasmic life. And it is almost certain that such hypothetical Life-spores were of common origin for both Earth and Mars."

The text and implications of such a theory didn't particularly offend Hayden. What he did mind, subconsciously, perhaps, was the more pertinent data which followed:

"The fact that there is a variance in the hereditary determinants between 'Homo Sapiens' and 'Homo Martianis' is certainly no reflection on such a theory.

"The existence of fifty-two chromosomes in the cells of the Martian species as opposed to forty-eight in the Earthly prototype may very well be a simple variance in the final evolutionary stages due to the extreme nature of the isolation mechanism which has

heretofore separated these species of common origin. Note, in support of this theory, the wide divergence between Australian, New World, and Old World species on Earth, some of which have no homologues in the other sectors.

"The one disquieting factor, now that Mars has been colonized by Earth-people, is the disturbing anomaly that Earth-Mars human hybrids are many times non-viable, but when viable are attended by a wide variance in physiological and psychical characteristics from either of the parents.

"It is a further anomalous phenomenon that when the hybrid offspring *are* viable, they carry the typical 'Heterosis' or extreme vigor of hybrid species. (Note the pronounced viability and vitality displayed by the Earthly hybrid, the Mule,—itself a product of the forty-eight chromosomal Equine and the Forty-six chromosomal Asinine forebears)."

The Earthman shifted uneasily, got up and packed his scanty belongings, most bulky of which were his medical supplies and equipment.

Irrelevantly he thought of an enigmatic Earthly coincidence which had always puzzled him. Surprisingly enough both man and the equine species are each endowed with forty-eight chromosomes for each somatic cell. And Hayden had often conjectured on the strange origin of myths which had given the lore of Man its Centaurs—those fabulous half-men half-horse creatures of legendary antiquity.

He grinned to himself at the whimsical parallel, then drew on the heavy gauntlets which protected him from the venomous bites of the 'Scatels' and 'Varones' which lurked unseen in the rocks and brush of the broad mesa. They were mean little vermin. Something like centipedes and scorpions, only worse.

Soon the tents were folded and rolled, the food and cooking equipment stowed away in the heavy packs. It was truly a primitive pilgrimage. There were not even covered wagons, for the precipitous range they had negotiated allowed of no vehicles.

Hayden thought bitterly of the Solar League officials, now all Earthmen, who during the last hundred years had gradually usurped even the allotted powers of the Martian Governor, who by edict was of Martian descent.

He remembered with a fierce anger the gradual change of the supposed political and social equality between Earthmen and Martians to a manipulated pseudo-serfdom controlled by the huge Earthly

corporations which had financed the original exploration and exploitation of Mars.

It was indeed a sad commentary that even in interplanetary affairs agreements, treaties and pacts meant no more than they had on Earth to those who had tasted of power and wealth, and wanted more.

Gradually, the intellectual but peaceful Martian people had been led deeper and deeper into the velvet-gloved tyranny, under the guise of protection and advancement. Only during the last few years had the underlying iron hand started to evidence itself. Only in the last few months had the discontent sent deep roots through the Martian peoples, leading to the organization of the "Patriots," whose cause Dr. Hayden and a few other earth-humans had championed.

But it hadn't helped. The clutch of the greedy powers was too strong for sporadic and isolated opposition, and the known leaders had finally been told to get out of Martropolis and its system of smaller cities, "or else."

Landron, Hayden, and others had known very well what "or else" meant, and had also known that only through time and careful organization could they hope to cope with the unscrupulous parties in power. Thus they had started, almost defenseless, on the long pilgrimage toward the primitive and unsettled wilds of Syrtis Major, which lay just North of the equator.

There they hoped to build a new civilization where, in time, they could enlist enough recruits from the Martian world to prepare for a concentrated effort to break the inequitable control of the Earth trusts. There, in Syrtis Major, they would be joined by groups from all the Martian cities. Reasoning people who had learned that escape and future development was the only solution to their problem.

"Ready, Doctor?"

Marl Landron had left the group and was helping one of the Martian men strap on a pack of Hayden's equipment.

"I believe so," the Earthman returned. "How is Kela?"

"She'll make it all right. She has tremendous vitality, for a woman. In fact, more than most of our men."

Hayden nodded. The lovely girl was certainly able to hold her

own on a forced march. She always did more than her share of the chores and difficult tasks; always ready to lend a helping hand.

Soon they were on their way again, Hayden acting as scout; for his Earth-muscles gave him a very decided advantage in scaling rocky buttresses and buttes to select their route.

Marl Landron was nominally the leader of the group, for his knowledge of Martian terrain was profound. Not only that, but a great if enigmatic intelligence looked out through his expressionless eyes. There wasn't much about Martians or Mars or Life that the old man didn't know.

Ahead of them the plateau was a broad green expanse of verdant grass and mosses, dotted here and there with jagged extrusive masses of rock which evidenced an original volcanic inception. Twisted and gnarled coniferous trees perched atop their massive barrel-like boles which hoarded the water for the long dry seasons.

Sarn Halin came up beside Hayden, his long strides almost matching the Earthman's. Kela's foster brother was certainly a fine specimen among Martian men, and Neil realized that he would make a fit husband for the girl. But deep inside, he resented Sarn. Resented the man's affection for Kela, and the devotion, born of life-long association, with which the girl regarded Sarn.

"We should be bearing a little more to the west, shouldn't we?" Sarn's voice was casual, but it incited a resentment in the Earthman.

"I don't believe so," he returned shortly. "I'll take another observation from the big butte a mile or two ahead."

"The country is getting lower, almost marshy," Sarn replied. "We might run onto a Lara, and they're particularly active during this season."

Hayden didn't answer; didn't make any attempt to alter their route. Sarn's suggestion was common sense, but entirely unacceptable to the Earthman. He strode along with the long swinging gait of the Earth-born in the 38% Martian gravity.

Ahead of them the vegetation was changing to a darker, more profuse green. Straggling "Phenedae" were appearing occasionally, their broad spongy disks each covering a wide area of grass, sucking up all available moisture. Great hideously red pulpy fruit topped the stems which reared stiffly above the spreading sucker-like vines; and each red fruit pod was a mass of tiny life.

The "Phenedae" were an unique type of parasitic vine which sheltered in its woody fruit thousands of hydra-like animalcules;

half vegetables, half animal, which in symbiotic communion with the plant, took nitrogen from the air and combined it in usable form for the Phenedae. In return, they were furnished a heavy nectar that oozed from the pores of the sponge-like fruit.

Hayden recalled the really interesting thing about the Phenedae. The nitrogenous compounds formed through the symbiotic efforts of the animalicules were exceedingly unstable, and could be detonated by various means, even by a concussion or blow. And when the fruit was more mature, dry, even a jar or a loud noise was sufficient. It was indeed a strange way nature had devised for scattering the seeds of the symbiotic parasites.

Hayden was beginning to feel ill at ease. Ahead of them the ground was becoming constantly more moist. Rank grass, the presence of increasing numbers of the Phenedae; all pointed toward marshy ground ahead. Ordinarily he wasn't at all bull-headed, but he couldn't bring himself to acknowledge Sarn's warning and turn back.

Anxiously he searched for the rocky butte he had set as his goal. It lay dead ahead, across a broad low area of tangled shrubs and high grasses. He strode through the luxuriant growth with a confidence he didn't feel. Now his heavy boots made sucking sounds, but he didn't look at Sarn.

Suddenly it happened. Great writhing arms came out of trenches in the marshy ground. At least a hundred writhing sucker-studded tentacles rose, contorted, converged toward the two men.

Hayden was a dozen feet in the lead—almost in the middle of the writhing trap. He shouted a warning. Sarn leaped back, just escaped the thick powerful arms that reached for him.

A Lara! Hayden's mind raced, even as he drew his knife, slashed viciously at the converging arms. "Land-octopus" was the name given it by Earthmen. But there was a remarkable and usually fatal difference!

Each set of tentacles or "trap" was merely a unit extension of the master-beast or main nerve center which lurked in a marshy retreat nearby. And from the controlling life-center ran thick connecting underground trunks to a dozen or more traps which lay in wait for animal life on the firmer ground.

"Watch out for the other traps!" Hayden yelled, his knife flashing but ineffective against the leathery tentacles. "Warn the others!"

By now the arms had converged and met over the Earthman's

head, forming a thick-barred impenetrable cage. Slowly the cage shrank, tightening toward him as the tentacles overlapped and intermeshed.

Sarn yelled a warning back to the group a few hundred yards behind them; started toward the trap which held Hayden.

"Don't get close!" warned Hayden frantically. "The tentacles will have you before you can cut even one!"

"Then what can I do?" Sarn asked helplessly.

"Spring the other traps.—Use your gun. Shoot the ground ahead of you.—Then you'll know that the Lara is somewhere near the center of the circle of traps!"

By now Marl Landron and the rest of the men had joined Sarn. They spread out and advanced cautiously, firing the explosive bullets into the ground ahead of them.

Here and there other tentacle traps sprang up as the explosions triggered their reactive mechanism. Before long ten units of waving tentacles formed a rough circle around a dense profusion of rank grass and green water near its center.

By now the enmeshing arms had closed within a few feet of Hayden, who was still slashing at the leathery surfaces.

The men closed in around the swampy pit at the center of the circle of traps, and the muffled explosions of bullets threw fountains of mud and viscous green water high into the air.

Hayden was tiring rapidly, and one of the closer arms touched his shoulder, bared by a rent in his shirt. He jerked away as he felt the insidious suction that would eventually drain the blood from his body, leaving it an empty husk.

"Don't waste your ammunition!" he shouted, gasping for breath. "Even a dozen direct hits wouldn't kill it!"

Sarn knew that was true. The huge, submerged bulk of the Lara was of too low an organization for a few hits to seriously injure it. He knew also that shooting blindly into the viscous mud of the swamp wouldn't produce many direct hits.

"What can we do?" he called to Hayden. "We don't have any explosives, or we could blast it."

Hayden didn't know, and he was busy slashing, slashing; trying to delay a little longer the time when those crushing tentacles would begin drinking through the suction discs.

Then he had an idea!

"The Phenedae," he gasped. "Gather as many of the fruit as you can!"

Sarn got the idea, told the men. He ran back, enlisted the help of the women. Soon hundreds of the big red fruit of the Phenedae were littering the ground around the pit.

"Let's try it," said Sarn abruptly. He took the small plastic tent which one of the men handed him, spread it out and with the help of the others rapidly heaped the spongy pods on it. Then four men each took a corner; made of it a massive bundle, tied it tight. Laboriously they maneuvered it over the edge, into the water hole.

"Ready?" Sarn shouted. The Earthman couldn't answer. The thick tentacles were compressing his body, expelling the air from his lungs. And already the skin around the suckers leaked drops of red.

Sarn and the other men raced back a hundred yards from the Lara pit. Then Sarn drew his gun, aimed carefully at the sinking bundle.

The sound of his shot was lost in the muffled roar of the explosion as the unstable nitrous compounds detonated, sending mud and water and pieces of black protoplasm high into the air.

Sarn raced forward into the falling debris; called sharply to Hayden. There was no answer.

Around the central pit of the Lara, its traps were convulsing, contracting their tentacles into quivering bundles of contorted limbs.

Savagely Sarn hacked at the leathery tentacles which still held the Earthman in tight embrace. Then Marl and the rest of the Martian men joined him and soon they had cut enough of the thick arms to pull Hayden free.

When Kela saw the limp form, she threw herself down, put her arms around the Earthman, sobbed softly.

"Oh, Marl—is he dead?—Is Neil dead?"

Sarn gently pulled her to her feet, and his eyes held a strange mixture of tenderness and hurt.

"No," he said. "Just bruised and short of oxygen. He'll be all right."

In the difficult days which followed, only the masterful Marographic knowledge of Landron kept them on a negotiable route toward Syrtis Major.

Both Hayden and Sarn were indispensable in their tireless vigor

and constant efforts to each do more than the other. But without Marl Landron's almost mystic ability, they would have pursued many a blind valley or box canyon. And their situation was desperate enough without further complication.

Food was running low. Shoes and clothes were wearing painfully thin, and strength and vitality, particularly among the women, were flagging fast.

"We've got our most dangerous area to cross within the next few weeks," Landron warned the men gathered around him for the morning council; a morning ritual when he coached them on the zone ahead, made suggestions for finding a suitable route.

"We're approaching the Lystian Meadows—one of the few really wet spots on Mars." The old Martian turned to Hayden, his jet eyes inscrutable in the wizened leathery face.

"Neil, for your benefit I might say that our legends tell us that this is the probable birth place of the Martian race.

"It is the lower extremity of the valley which the Lystian River has cut for thousands of miles from the melting fringe of the polar cap.

"Almost due south it follows its tortuous route through gigantic ranges and fantastic forests, along the Eastern boundary of Syrtis Major, and eventually to the Lystian Meadows.

"Here its precipitous course abruptly changes to the leisurely pace of a thousand tiny streams winding their way sluggishly among islands and deltas choked with vegetation.

"And it literally teems with inimical forms of life.—It is easy for any Martian who has encountered and survived its difficulties to understand why his ancient forebears forsook the land of their inception to migrate to the more arid regions further South.

"There, at least they were comparatively free from the insidious bacterial infections and fantastic vermin which are ever more dangerous to Man than life-forms of formidable size."

Landron paused, addressed his words more particularly to Hayden and Sarn.

"In final word of warning," he said. "Be cautious rather than too ambitious. Use your good judgment rather than unthinking vigor to battle your obstacles."

Then the group resumed its daily march, Sarn and Neil forging ahead to search out the easiest route. Ahead of them the mesa dropped

away in massive steps of purple hills to the haze-shrouded lowlands which marked the boundary of the Lystian Valley.

Far in the sagging distance the morning sun painted tiny silver streaks in the lurking green of the valley below. Here and there hazy discs of water seemed almost to float above the scene, shimmering evanescently through the deep blue haze of far-away things.

Carefully the two men picked their way down past crags, around buttresses, and through narrow defiles. Each was intensely alert, for here again was typical Gethlone terrain, and neither had forgotten the frightful experience early in the journey when they had almost lost Kela.

Kela. There again was the thought. In recent weeks Hayden had become increasingly aware and ashamed of his feeling for the girl, and even more impatient with his inner dislike for Sarn Halin.

With annoyance and a deep pain of frustration, he told himself bitterly what he already knew. Almost fiercely he reminded his emotions that Kela was a Martian; an alien species; and that deeper feeling between them was utterly unthinkable.

He vindictively tortured himself by reviewing the enigmatic but irremediable fact that union between Earth-humans and Martians was taboo. In fact, it was considered miscegenation by the Solar League, and outlawed as such under penalty of death.

Not that the decision of the League was incorrect or unjust; for during his medical career, Hayden had seen the offspring from illicit inter-unions, and even yet the memory was painful.

Such hybrid were monstrous in their departure from physical resemblance to either of their "Homo Martianis" or "Homo Sapiens" parents. And if that were not enough, the viable specimen of such crosses possessed a virulently malignant psychic structure at complete variance to either of its forbears.

This malign and alien outlook, coupled with the heterosis; the extreme vigor and vitality of such hybrids as lived to mature, made the ruling of the League the only sensible decision in order to protect both human races from probable destruction by mutant hybrid descendants!

It was a tough and bitter mental morsel, and it didn't make the Earthman any more receptive to the fact that Marl Landron quite apparently expected his daughter and foster son to eventually make a match.

"Neil!" came Sarn's cry from a ridge across to the right. "Watch out—Gethlone!"

Hayden swung in the direction of Sarn's point, saw a flash of motion over the edge of an iron-stained rib of rock. There was no hint of the Gethlone's mental impact, for all the party had taken the thalamic drug in preparedness. But the physical threat still remained, and their ammunition was getting low.

Rapidly they returned to the group, warned all to be prepared. Then they chose an alternate route, to the east of the concealing buttresses, which led into a narrow defile which wound a tortuous and precipitous way down toward the valley. It was a more difficult route to negotiate, but both Sarn and Neil agreed on its selection.

It was a rugged trip down toward the haze-tinted green of the Lystian Valley. Three times they camped at nightfall in the confines of the narrow defile where each word spoke again with a thousand decreasing voices.

Every movement was a harsh clamor that echoed from wall to wall until each human felt like screaming his defiance at the insistent sound.

Twice, high above on the edge of the flanking cliffs, the swollen silhouettes of Gethlone appeared limned against the pale lumen of the sky as if listening to the murmuring ghosts of sound.

Once Hayden had to suture the Martian Zeni's hand where ragged gneiss-like rock had slashed it like broken glass. Once he injected Yaldin's wife with the antidote for the deep sharp sting of the scorpion-like "Varone," when she had forgotten to shake out her gauntlets before putting them on.

But these more or less minor ills didn't worry Hayden so much. It was the thought of the unknown menaces which the ancient valley might hold which bothered him. It was the fear of insidious and unknown germ life that kept him up until the midnight hours, poring intently over "Martian Parasitology and Human Disease."

On the fourth day, almost at noon, they thankfully emerged from the narrow crevasse out onto a sloping bench which overlooked the rank growth of the lowlands. Silently, wearily they made camp to rest from their tortuous descent.

During the afternoon the Earthman studied assiduously. And the glimmer of his reading light was a fitful beacon far into the night for those who could not sleep.

Few slept, tired as they were, for the weird sounds of marsh-life

were stridently menacing, and the fierce buzzing of countless flying insects kept them busy with nets and gauzes.

When morning crept wearily into the east, the pilgrims arose, eyes lack-lustre and sunken, once more to begin the daily battle. Slowly the night-sounds faded before the cold reason of day, and the throbbing tune of the insects sank to a lower key.

"Neil, I want to see you a minute."

Hayden turned at Kela's voice; wanted to take her clean cool loveliness in his arms. He answered curtly.

"Yes?"

"Please try to get along with Sarn," she pleaded, her entreating eyes green as the deep emerald of her wispy scarf. "He isn't like himself. Even he and Dad had a quarrel last night."

"What about?" the Earthman asked shortly, then wished he hadn't, for it certainly was no affair of his.

"Oh,—I don't quite know," the girl answered unevenly. She looked out across the vista of marshy lowlands, profuse with matted vegetation and gravid with enigmatic menace. "Please try. We need you both so much."

Hayden watched her trim figure as she turned with the parting plea and went back to her work. Then Sarn, too, was feeling tension. Neil knew that in all fairness he must see that no further incident involving Kela arose to antagonize her foster brother.

For certainly he, an Earthman, had no right whatever to interfere. Furthermore they desperately needed Sarn's whole-hearted cooperation during the grim elemental battle which remained before them.

It was slow, infuriatingly frustrating work trying to find a route through the tangled morass. Sometimes they fought through a mile of protesting lianas and sucking mires, only to come to wide sloughs of bottomless green slime.

Each time they turned back from the unknown dangers of the bubbling depths, Neil wished with all his soul for a boat or raft. But there was nothing whatever available more substantial than the tangled creepers and soggy moss.

Sarn had been sullen, morose, all day and he answered Neil's friendly queries with curt monosyllables. Something was definitely bothering him, and Hayden got the impression that it was more than a subconscious jealousy of Kela.

"Neil!" came the sharp exclamation from behind. "Doc—Marl's been bitten!"

In a moment he was beside the old Martian. Azil had slashed the leather boot top on Landron's right leg, revealing a single deep puncture that was already discolored and oedemus.

The Earthman gasped, then his movements were deft and quick as he removed the boot, slashed the thick cloth of the breeches leg and turned it back.

"My kit," he said tersely. While Azil was getting it he asked in clipped words: "When did this happen, Marl? Why didn't you tell me?"

"Yesterday morning," the old man said. His weathered countenance was completely emotionless, but his eyes were dull. "Thought it was only a sharp thorn."

"It was no thorn," Hayden said. "But I don't know of any vermin with a single fang. Though perhaps it might have been—" He left his sentence unfinished as he deftly made deep crossed incisions over the puncture and applied the suction cup.

"How do you feel?" he asked Marl.

"All right. Perhaps a little weak."

"If this happened yesterday morning," said the Earthman thoughtfully, "it's not a common venom, or the reaction would have been very evident long before now. We'd better make camp for today and see that the puncture's well drained."

They chose a grassy promontory which was considerably higher than the dank marsh around it. Rapidly they prepared for the night.

It was a long one. Full of the resulting progress of unknown things and the seething, bubbling sounds of the swamp. Once a small flying reptile got caught in the insect netting of Yaldin's tent and hissed its venomous hate like a tiny siren until it was extricated and killed. Several times foot-long amphibious 'Golats' slithered up from the water, drawn by the enticing smell of living things.

In the morning Hayden examined Marl's wound. The discoloration and local inflammation was rapidly subsiding, and he declared himself able to go on.

All day the grim little Martian kept up with the group. But Hayden watched him closely. That evening he took a blood sample. After an hour's work with his reagents and portable microscope, he called Zeni and checked type, then gave Landron a transfusion.

Each day was an endless thwarting of effort in the swamp's intricate maze. Some days they might gain a thousand yards, as

measured by guessing the distance of the high range behind them. Other days it seemed that they lost ground.

And after each day's gruelling effort, Hayden would call on some member of the party who had volunteered, and would give Marl another transfusion.

Sarn had not contributed. He had not volunteered, and Hayden had not asked him to. Neither had he called on the women yet. They needed all their strength.

One evening Marl called the Earthman to him. He was already in his sleeping bag, trying to obtain a maximum of rest for the day to follow.

"What is it, Neil? Which bug got me?" he asked.

Hayden shifted uneasily.

"You might as well tell me," the Martian said, an expressionless grin creasing his leathery features. "I presume it's a matter of time. But I've got to hold out till we get to Syrtis!"

"All right," Hayden said in sudden decision. "You've a right to know. It's 'Plasmodium Trypanosoma,' a flagellate phagocytic protozoan named for two Earthly types, part of whose characteristics it combines. In layman's terms, it is a tiny protozoan animalcule with a flagella or tail for rapid swimming. And it, like the amoeba, folds itself around its food and absorbs it.

"The tiny, living bits of protoplasm are carried around in the bodies of the Martian flying scorpion, or 'Dena,' and complete part of their life cycle within this host. It's something similar to the life story of 'Plasmodium Vivas,' one of the organisms which cause 'Malaria' on Earth, which is carried by the 'Anopheles' mosquito.

"As is common in such relationship there seems to be some sort of symbiosis between the Trypanosomic Plasmodium and its host. It apparently aids the digestion of the 'Dena,' and after spending half its life cycle in the alimentary canal of the scorpion host, finds its way into the protein fluid in the scorpion's sting sack and is injected into any new animal host which the 'Dena' may happen to sting.

"The insidious phase of the continued life cycle in the new host is that the only food absorbed by the 'Plasmodia' is 'Erythrocytes'—the red blood cells!"

"Creating a kind of pernicious anemia," Marl completed quietly. "I understand."

"The worst of it is," continued Hayden, "that any specific drug

which affects this parasite also is lethal to the white corpuscles of the blood. And without those protective phagocytes," he continued bitterly, "a dozen different types of disease germs would kill you within a matter of a few days."

Landron nodded. "Do you think you can keep me alive long enough to reach Syrtis? I'm the only one who knows this country at all, and mapping it would be an almost impossible task."

"It's possible," said Hayden, his lips compressed. "But we have no blood bank other than the members of the group. And I don't know how long they can stand the constant drain."

"Time will tell," said the old man grimly. "Unfortunately it's the only way!"

Now the members of the party redoubled their efforts to traverse the confusing maze of the Lystian swamps. And each day Landron and the other Martian men grew a little weaker.—Marl from the increasing anemia, and the others from the donation of blood more frequently than their bodies could stand.

Finally Hayden was forced to accept Kela's repeated and insistent offers. He drew a sample and retired to his tent to check for type. The precaution was almost unnecessary, for Martians possess an almost universal blood type. Only in one out of ten thousand was there a factor incompatible with the other type. But it paid to be sure.

With deft fingers he prepared a serum from the sample of Kela's blood, tested it against an incubated serum of Landron's.

The Earthman blinked his eyes. A heavy flocculant precipitate was forming in the test tube!

He carefully repeated the test. The same thing occurred. His mind was racing.—This wasn't the ordinary reaction, even between the rare X-type and the A, or universal-type Martian blood! It was—

Hayden almost threw down the tube, strode rapidly to Marl Landron's tent.

"What is this?" he demanded without preliminaries. "Why didn't you tell me about Kela?"

The old man looked up with dull eyes. "Oh." He grinned faintly. "So the secret is out."

Neil had no regard now for the other's condition. He had to know!

"Why was it kept a secret all these years?" he demanded roughly. "Didn't you even tell her?"

Marl shook his head wearily. "I had made up my mind to tell her tomorrow." He paused, brushed a thin and shaky hand across his lips. "I knew the time had come."

"But why not before now?" Hayden persisted, puzzled anger creasing his forehead.

"It's a long story," returned Landron weakly. "Tied up with vicious hatreds of loyalist Martians in the early days of the coming of the Earthmen to Mars. I'm not proud of it. And the years of time have slowly wiped much of the vengeful hate from my mind.

"With age," he continued with a twisted smile, "the heavy passions of youth slowly give way to a more semantic concept of Life's meaning. One gradually gains a greater tolerance for both objective and subjective conflicts."

He paused, closed his eyes. Landron's strength was rapidly failing, and Neil knew that a transfusion must be given rapidly.

Sarn, the only man who had not contributed blood, was not to be found. Hayden didn't dare call upon the men who had contributed this soon again. Finally he accepted the offer from one of the women.

Marl had lapsed into a sleep which was almost a coma. He didn't even awaken as Hayden gave the transfusion.

Early the next morning Hayden made it a point to see Kela as soon as she had dressed.

"Kela," he said. "Marl has something to tell you. I want you to hear it from his lips."

She looked up at Neil in puzzlement at his tone, quickly finished coiling the long black braids of her shining hair, then hastened toward Landron's tent.

When she came from the tent an hour later, her green eyes held a strange mixture of sadness and of—exuberant joy.

"Oh Neil!" she cried. "I don't know what to say!"

The green eyes glistened with a hint of moisture, and her lips quivered.

"I know the shock it must be," Neil said tenderly. "A lifetime of background and emotions and loyalties jerked out from under you in a single moment! It's something that one can't assimilate immediately."

She straightened her slim shoulders, held her head high. She held out a hand.

"Hi, fellow Earthman!" she greeted.

Hayden held onto the slim hand, drew her into his arms.

"I've wanted to do this for so long," he told her gravely. He felt the nod of her head against his shoulder. "Now you can't marry Sarn, a Martian," he continued. "You'll have to be content with one of your own species—like me!"

She drew back her head, looked at him steadily for a moment with wide clear eyes, then she slipped from his arms.

"Marl's terribly weak, Neil," she said hurriedly. "I'm afraid that he—" Her voice faltered, then was clear again. "He can't last much longer without more blood."

That day they carried the old Martian in an improvised litter, and they had to lean low to catch his words of advice concerning their route.

As soon as they had made camp for the evening, Hayden followed Sarn out on a point of solid land which jutted above the level of the soggy terrain.

"Sarn," Neil said brusquely. "I don't know what the matter is between you and your foster father, but I want you to know that he's dying. We need blood for him, and need it badly!"

Sarn Halin jerked out of his reverie, stared at the Earthman a moment and started to speak. Then a twisted grin crossed his face. He shrugged.

"Suit yourself," he said, baring his arm for the physician.

Minutes later Neil was working swiftly in his tent. When the serums were ready, he tipped a beaker, let a thin stream trickle into the liquid in the test-tube.

For the second time he saw the thick white precipitate form.

Quickly he repeated the test and got the same reaction.

Slowly he turned, put down the tube, and stumbled out into the night. He stared up at the enigmatic depths of the fire-flecked sky. But even the mysteries of the heavens didn't seem to compare with the one he had just discovered.

For Marl Landron had raised not one—but two foster Earth-human children!

In the long, difficult days and endless nights that followed, Neil nurtured his guilty secret. He couldn't quite bring himself to risk his new-found happiness with Kela. He couldn't tell her of his discovery. Yet he knew that he must.

Marl was sinking more and more frequently into prolonged comas from which he emerged only long enough to haltingly discuss their route. It no longer even helped very much when Hayden

gave him the very sparing transfusions which he dared take from the rapidly weakening Martian men and women.

For it seemed that the insidious parasites had multiplied to a point where the new red corpuscles of the transfused blood seemed only a morsel for voracious appetites.

Then one day they reached the edge of the Lystian Meadows and gratefully made camp on the pungent shrub-covered slopes of the Martian Appalachians. In another two days they gained the top of the range to stare down at the broad green coolness of virgin forests and fertile plains. Syrtis Major!

It had been a long and difficult struggle, and only time would tell whether they would eventually gain the major sociological goal which they sought.

When camp had been made, Marl Landron asked to be propped up so that he could see. And for long hours his enigmatic old eyes looked out across their new domain.

That night Neil luxuriously lounged back on the soft dry grass and studied Kela who sat with fingers laced behind her head, looking up at the sky. Her face was lovely, almost startlingly beautiful under the pale light of Phobos and Deimos.

Strange moment! Not often did the two moons compete for supremacy in the Martian sky. Nor was it often necessary for a man to be entirely truthful in the fantastic game of Love.

But Hayden knew that he must tell Kela his secret. Must let her know that Sarn was not barred from her affections by racial reasons.

"Kela," he said at last. "I have something to tell you. Something I should have told you days ago."

"Not about another girl?" she teased, scooting over to rest her elbow on his knee.

He shook his head and continued with the story.

Kela watched his face intently while he talked, and even by the wan light of the tiny moons her eyes were deep green feminine enigmas.

When he had finished, she laughed softly, kissed him lightly.

"Yes, I know," she said. "Dad told Sarn and me a month ago."

• • • • •

The TRIAL

By ATLANTIS HALLAM

*€ The Martian court guaranteed justice for all.
And why not? Didn't they have an infallable judge?*

ILLUSTRATED BY ROY HUNT

"THE day has come," said the Prime Tender. "You, Terran Visitor, have been given time for congress with your thoughts. Now you must go before the Golden Teller and know your fate. Follow us."

Earthlinger rose, looking uncertainly from one to the other of the three tall figures before him. Their black bow ties grew great in size before his blurred eyes, pressing down upon him like mighty wings of darkness. He fearfully started down the corridor called Time, following close behind the Secondary Tender. And following behind him, he was aware of the Third Tender. The footsteps of the Predatorians made no sound, and only the hollow echo of his own space boots sounded down the long hallway.

"Here in Predatoria," said the Secondary Tender, turning his hooded head slightly, "You must give reason for your presence."

"Yes—" Earthlinger agreed quickly. "Yes, I will."

He hoped for a moment they would pause, listen to him. But they did not.

"We came to Mars," Earthlinger began, tossing the sand shock of hair back off his damp forehead, "I mean, Predatoria, as you gentlemen call it, to study your philosophical culture. Your world is far beyond our own in that respect."

Hearing his own words, Earthlinger felt a momentary pride at his own simple explanation, his impulsive sincerity. It was good, he was sure.



"To study our culture," the Prime Tender weighed his words.

"Of course, of course," repeated the Secondary Tender.

"Yes," Earthlinger said eagerly. "And as friends."

The black-robed three made no comment.

"I—that is, we came as friends. It was sheer mishap that my two companions were killed. Of course, I'll have to account for them. When I return home to my world."

"And here, also," said the Prime Tender.

"Here also," repeated the other two.

"The versatility of truth is not denied, Terran Visitor," said the Prime Tender. "Therefore, you must give credence to your story."

"I will, I *will*," he told the Prime One. "I'll tell *exactly* how it happened."

"Yes," said the Secondary Tender, "you must do that before the bar of justice, the Golden Teller. And too, tell *why* their deaths came so opportunely, *after* their loading of your Terran ship. And your ship loading, that remains a peculiar way in which to study our Predatorialian culture."

"We didn't intend to—to take all the gold. We—that is, we needed ballast. And of course, the gold was best."

"Of course, of course," the three agreed.

Earthlinger glanced quickly behind him again. The unsmiling Third Tender stared straight ahead, steadily keeping on with the slow pace. A little uneasy now, he hurried to get back in step with them, centering his eyes on the black-hooded Predatorialian directly before him. His thoughts grew more blurred as the terrible processional paced on.

I could tell them my age, I'm only twenty-three, and maybe they'd not—not go through with it. Just let me go. But how much do they really know? Of course they couldn't, they couldn't know. It looks like an accident. Only an accident, and I can't be held accountable. Jim Conklin and Phillip Ward, they were killed when the ladder slipped—yes, slipped, from the hatchway hooks where I was standing, watching them climb up. Then they landed far below, in the great hollow before the mine shaft. But luckily, after all the gold was loaded, all of it! Pure gold.

He abruptly stopped his wildly tumbling thoughts for just then the Prime Tender looked back. But he said nothing, only facing

forward again, continuing the unbearable march in Time to the death that came closer every minute.

"Say—can't any of you tell me anything, *anything* about the trial? What's it like—or who is the judge?"

"We are only the Tenders," said the Prime One finally. Tenders of the justice, and for the Teller."

"Only the Tenders," said the Secondary One.

"The *Tenders*," whispered the Third, over his shoulder.

"But please!" he begged now, more desperate in the merciless walk, "*Please* tell me something?"

"You shall be fairly tried, Terran Visitor, at two hours beyond the midnight," the Prime Tender intoned. "The Golden Teller is just, and you shall find that you yourself are heaven and hell."

"The Teller is *truly* just," agreed the Secondary Tender.

"Yes!" repeated the Third, nudging him from behind, "Heaven and *hell*! Even *you* cannot decry the verdict."

"I—I hope it's very just," he breathed, more to himself than to the three. *I hope so.*"

"The Teller will decide," the Prime Tender informed him, "in concert with the circumstance."

The Secondary nodded, and Earthlinger glanced back, hoping the Third Tender would not poke his ribs again.

But no matter how he tried, he could not forget the vivid picture of that last day, the day his two best friends had—well, died. He had gotten rid of them and would now have all the gold to—then he quickly erased the thought. He was sure these solemn Predatorians didn't know much if anything about telepathy, but he *couldn't* take chances. He must not even *think* the truth.

Trying vainly to escape his mental picture of the journey from Earth to Mars, he could feel small beads of sweat forming on his back. Then the large warts would touch and he could feel them channel down his spinal column. The underground Predatorial civilization was finely air-conditioned but still he felt a dread chill in this Corridor of Time. He knew what caused it. And he hoped that *only* he knew.

"You are about to learn your fate," said the Prime Tender. "Now you must take this one last potion—"

"Learn your fate," whispered the other two in unison. "Finish the potion, finish it up!"

"You—" Earthlinger stammered, draining the goblet, "you say

the judge, his decision is final? No matter what I say, he can tell the truth?"

"Yes," the three replied. "He will know. He'll *know*."

"Suppose—suppose he thinks I'm guilty . . . of anything?"

"The stoning pit," replied the Prime Tender, and the other two repeated his words.

Taking him by the arm the Prime Tender led him forward now, to the small dais at the end of Time's corridor. All three nodded silently and he stepped up onto it. He tried hard to conceal his true feelings, to stop the pouring sweat, as he stared at the heavy black curtain before him.

From somewhere, seemingly far off behind him, he could hear the solemn voice of the Prime Tender.

"Behold your master, man of Earth, your highest court of all."

The great blackness slowly parted before him.

"Now look upon his mien," said the Prime voice, and the other two repeated, "*Look* upon his mien."

For a stunned moment Earthlinger stared at the terrified, dazed reflection in the Golden Teller. Then his mind worked swiftly—fear ordered flight.

He whirled—just as the Prime Tender nodded. The Secondary Tender hurled the empty goblet, but it missed him. It struck the Golden Teller, shattering his frightened image into a thousand vibrations.

"To the stoning pit—" intoned the Prime Tender above the golden din, "the stoning pit!"

"The stoning pit!" shouted the Secondary Tender. "The Teller is *always* just!"

And close behind his shoulder Earthlinger heard the relished whisper of the Third and final Tender:

"The *stoning* pit!"

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The OSILANS

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

SERIAL—PART III

¶ All mankind needed to do to throw off the shackles of the Osilans was to act civilized for the fraction of a second!

ILLUSTRATED BY ROY HUNT

SYNOPSIS

JAY BARD, interested in electronics, experiments with a home-made oscilloscope. One day the dancing green lines of the recording graph develop a bulge—as if something were moving through them. Additional experiments cause the green bulge to jump completely off the screen, flit across the workshop and disappear!

He realizes the strange patterns are not caused by any *human* agency—and soon discovers that he has made contact with the mysterious intelligence responsible for their strange behavior. He catches a word, thrice repeated: "Albino! Albino! Albino!"

That evening he encounters a man—an albino—who leads him to a strange rendezvous with two male and three female albinos. They inform him that they are Osilans—and that they expect him to cooperate with them in uncovering the solution to a number of unsolved crimes.

An argument develops. The next moment Bard has exited from the secret room to which the albino has led him—and finds himself on the street surrounded by shouting people. He has abruptly materialized in their midst from a solid brick wall! Police appear; question him. Before he quite realizes what has happened, he has discussed with them a number of old murders—and given them the names of the murderers!

That night he receives a visit from Police Lieutenant Roth—but soon realizes it isn't the real Lieutenant Roth. He learns that the imposter comes from the same world as the Osilans—but is opposed to them. His name is "Emden-5716," and he requests to be taken to Bard's workroom. But when they descend the steps into the basement it is no longer there. Instead they enter a tremendous underground world, filled with rows of huge machines which are operated by exact duplicates of Emden-5716.

The original Emden gives Bard a piece of metal and sends him back to his home. There he finds the police looking for him. He shows them the strange substance, which is also examined by scientists from Franklin and Marshall College—who insist it came from the ocean's depths. They demand an explanation, but Bard is as confused as they.

When the news of his success in solving crime is released, Bard's fame spreads throughout the country. People start "beating a pathway to his door." To escape them he takes refuge in his workshop, where he is visited by Zeda, one of the female Osilans.

Promising him another visit to her homeland, she summons Emden-5716 to act as guide. In Ja-land, as the albinos' world is known, Bard sees the Osilans as they really are: black, almost shapeless, faintly saurian creatures. He learns that they are members of an ancient, mythical race, vaguely known to mankind as the Will Born, which had once dwelt on the surface.

But the information he gains which really stuns him is that *Earthmen—all the myriad humans dwelling on the surface of the Earth—are mere thought projections of the Osilans!* Through the ages it seems, these projections have gotten somewhat unruly and gained some stability of their own, but are still subject to Osilan control, which is accomplished by creating constant crises, with resultant mental confusion, among the surface people.

He learns also that he is expected to continue his task of bringing criminals to justice—with the Osilans supplying the solutions.

Home again, Bard interviews those who have come to seek his help in solving crimes. In each instance, he receives a clear mental picture of the guilty parties. But Bard is determined to outwit the Osilans, and he presents an entirely different solution to every case.

When the interviews are over, Jay Bard returns to his workroom tired but happy. His satisfaction is short-lived, however, for he finds Zeda there awaiting him—*her cold face radiating complete triumph!*

XII

"My" Zeda

"JAY BARD!" said Zeda softly. "Perfect pupil of the Osilans! We have never had a more efficient missionary!"

"I did nothing the Osilans required of me!" I snapped, studying her, hating her, fearing her.

"You deviated in no iota from our wishes!" she said. "You are an *honest* man. Do we not know this? So we turn your honesty to Osilans' account! Do you think to free our projections from us so easily? You who are but a projection yourself?"

"Are you trying to tell me that somewhere in Ja-land is an Osilan who pulls my strings as if I were a marionette, making me dance to his wishes?"

"Correct, except that he is not now in Ja-land!"

I glared at the woman, if woman she were. Her eyes danced, but there was hell in them. I began to realize what she was telling me.

"*You!*" I choked.

"Exactly! You are more my slave than even the Emdens are slaves



of other Osilans! I have overshadowed you since the day you were born! I have overshadowed you in every life you have lived!"

"Man lives but once!"

"Man lives forever, through many *material* lives! He lives at the pleasure of the Osilans of the Deeps. Naturally the Osilans do not care to disappear; they make sure he lives."

"But men are not projections. They are fathered of other men, born of women! They are children of parents. . . ."

"Who thus hoped, long ago, when first man mated with woman, to escape the Osilans' domination, but did not succeed! Men, women, meet, love and mate because they are influenced by the Osilans!"

"I do not believe it! If all I just told those poor harassed people upstairs is untrue, then it will be proved to be untrue when they check for evidence to convict, for proof of what I told them!"

Zeda snorted. It wasn't ladylike. It was faintly saurian.

"If we can control *people*, do you think the providing of evidence poses a problem? Jay Bard—and would you be surprised if you knew your *real ancient name*!—we Osilans are the masters of vibration. Everything in the Universe is vibration—color, sound, *people*. By vibration we rule. Vibration is the law."

"There is no escape?"

"Only in severance, which is impossible. All we have to do to maintain ourselves is keep our projections *mentally confused*."

"Why? What do you get out of it?"

"What everybody gets out of accomplishment: food, power, riches, satisfied desire. . . ."

"We are channels for *food*?"

Zeda shrugged. "Even Osilans must live!"

I knew what I must do. I must first free myself. Having done that, I would set about freeing others. Zeda may have read my mind. She was watchful, watchful but disdainful. I gave her no chance to escape me. I shot out both hands to grasp her about the throat. My fingers curved, encompassing an alabaster neck. Golden hair touched my wrists. The flesh of Zeda was *human* flesh. I squeezed, lifting her from the chair, shaking her as a dog shakes a snake. I held her tightly against me—and she laughed in my face! Not loudly, because I shut off her laughter with my palms, but by grimace. She was profoundly amused. I could understand. I was shadow, striving to destroy substance. I was man destroying his creative impulse. Realiza-

tion of helplessness filled me with fury. I held the woman with my left hand, drove my right fist into her face with all my power. *The face broke and bled!*

Courage came back. If Zeda were, after all, *human*. . . .

Laughter came through the bloody froth on Zeda's face.

I had never done murder. I had never wished to do murder. But if ever murder were justified, it was now. I manhandled Zeda as a gorilla might have done it. I tore her clothes. When rents in her dress showed her flesh I struck her there with my fists. I gave my hands to the task of destroying all this evil woman's human camouflage. I kicked her, slugged her. I even struck her in the face with my forehead.

When she was limp, and quite dead, I could still, inside me, hear her contemptuous laughter.

I lifted her from the floor where I had mauled her. I slammed the body down in my chair. I sat down on a box facing her, panting like a tired runner.

"So, there is no way to be free of you, is there? Well, this will serve notice on Thors and the rest of them—men will be free from your influence if I myself must hunt down and destroy your five accomplices, Zeda! And if I am your projection, as you told me, how is it that I live, and you are dead?"

There was, of course, no answer. But I wasn't exactly talking to Zeda. I knew that wherever she went, wherever each of the other five went, the attention of all Osilans, and perhaps all Emdens, was on her. Osilans would be watching now—so it was to the Osilans I spoke.

Zeda's body began to move in the chair, as a limp body will before rigor mortis sets in. It faded, melted, ran together, became something naked and foul that looked like a saurian. Then it began to coalesce, so quickly I could scarcely follow. It formed a black mass. Then it began to grow small with horrible rapidity. In a matter of seconds it was no larger than my hand.

Then it became a ring of green and vanished against the north wall of my basement, with a little sound that was like eldritch laughter! Sweat bathed my body as if I would drown in it.

There was no mistaking the laughter. I hadn't imagined it. It was ringing loudly in my basement now—the unmistakable laughter of Zeda of the Osilans. Not only that, but there she was, back in my

chair, as I had first seen her, with no black and blue marks on her, no blood on her face, no slightest indication that I had beaten her to death with my bare fists.

She wore different garments, as if she had run home briefly to change, but there was no mistake about it, this was Zeda—who claimed that I was her own special projection!

"I find you very amusing, Jay Bard!" she said. "But then, if I had not, I would not have maintained you all these ages!"

"You vile, hideous, ugly . . ."

"Please, Jay, not *ugly*!"

". . . venomous, hellish, *beast*!"

"You are my shadow, remember? Where do you, then, fit into this description?" said Zeda, her lips very red, her teeth white and *hungry* looking. "I *am* amused by you, shadow! What would you like most, this very instant, that I might be induced to give you? Bear in mind, before you ask, that all that has ever been possible to you has been possible because of me. All that has been possible, is possible still!"

I knew what she meant. She knew that I knew, and laughed with delight. She was Jezebel, then; she was Sappho, Messalina, Cleopatra and Mary of Alexandria, as if she could project *them* at will.

"Do you enjoy a glimpse of your conscience?" she asked. "Bah! There is neither good nor bad, save as we allow you to possess the one or the other."

Hatred served nothing; neither did fury, despair, brutality. I must *think, plan, devise*.

"There must be a way to be free of you," I said to Zeda. "There must be a key. I shall find it."

"I shall be deeply interested in your search!"

For just a moment I had seen an expression of surprise in her face. It gave me hope. I was not *completely* her shadow, else she would have known my thought before I thought it. There was *some* separateness, in spite of all she said—unless she were trying to trick me again, by allowing me to believe, to have hope. But what interest could there possibly be for Zeda, playing Svengali to my Trilby—playing tricks with her own shadow?

There was something somewhere, if only I could find it.

"Vibrations," I said. "Rhythm. *Electrons*!"

"Good!" she almost clapped her hands. "Electrons are that of

which everything in the universe is made—even Osilans, even Emdens, even humanity—even the Deeps of all the oceans. Command the electrons and you command everything, including form, color, sound. Wrest this command from the Osilans and you will be free—*because you will not exist.*"

"Then," she said, somewhat diffidently, I thought, "the Osilans do not exist either. You have served us for so many eons we would be helpless without you."

"And destroying all humanity would be a rather drastic and unrealistic way to free us of the Osilans!"

"Expensive!" she said. "But keep thinking. It amuses me to watch you think that you think. Maybe I can help. If you really had electricity harnessed you could make anything of it you could imagine. It's electron-stuff, too!"

"Thanks! There might be a way to blow up Ja-land!"

"A slight problem intervenes!" Zeda pointed out. "Man's nearest contact with Ja-land is in those Deeps of Mindanao, Japanese and other Trenches which are covered by something more or less than six miles of salt water! Man may some day find a way to reach down so far, with some charge sufficient to disturb the repose of Osilans, but by the time he progresses so far the Osilans will have found a defense! Humanity never *stays* ahead of the Osilans!"

"Tell me something, O mother Zeda!" I said. "Am I the first man to know the relationship between men and the Osilans?"

"In this century, yes," she smiled, as if at a precocious child. "But in every century there are several. They are all matters of record. . . ."

"Record?"

"Hidden in myths, in the story of Hercules, of Ulysses, of Prometheus, Hermes, *Adam Kadmon and the Fall of Man!* Every religion is the record of man's struggle to be free of the Osilans! The aboriginal idolator strives to be free of us. Every great mystic tries also—and the greatest have been so close—so close, I may as well admit it, *that some have actually escaped!*"

I stared at her, waiting for more. She studied my face so intently that hope rose higher and higher. I could do, think, feel, and she did not necessarily *cause* me to do it—she could only influence me. If I could throw it off . . . if I could somehow throw it off for all mankind. . . .

"Then you would have that Utopia which man has always

dreamed about," said Zeda, reading my thought at the last. "That is what Utopia *is*, by the way; the idea grew, through the ages, out of man's desire to be free—*free of the Will Born Osilans!* Now, Jay Bard, *my very own*, go back into your world. Your solutions to problems for your fellows have begun to produce results—*naturally*, since Ja-land provides the evidence, 'plants the clues' I believe you call it, 'frames the sucker' is another of your delightful phrases!"

From Zeda to the green ring was all but instantaneous. As if to jeer at me the green ring settled for a moment or two on the screen of my oscilloscope. Then it came out with no help from me or my magnets—as if to prove its independence—and vanished for the second time that night. I did not expect to sleep, but I did sleep, until the telephone snapped me awake at dawn. A newspaper woman was on the line.

"You solved a hundred and twenty problems yesterday," she said. "Some statistics are in on them. Seventy one have been completed. Have you any comment?"

"Not knowing the results of my star-gazing," I said, "how can I comment?"

"Oh, as if you didn't know! Every solution so far has proved to be one hundred percent correct. There is one odd thing about each, however, especially solutions of crimes. . . ."

"Yes?"

"Officers of the law in each case found proof of your solutions in completely unknown channels; channels entirely overlooked in all previous investigations of the same cases!"

Once again I could hear the jeering laughter of Zeda—amused that her shadow would, in such anxiety, destroy the substance without which he could not exist! I had to admit, it *was* droll!

And I was more determined than ever. One thing, clearly, was needed: a shock greater than that of any earthquake, any volcano, any explosive known to man.

If such were ever found, and used, what would remain of the "shadows" of the Osilans? Masters of vibration, the Osilans would perhaps remain if the last human on earth went up in flames—then calmly return to their ancient tasks of projection, filling the new earth with new "men."

There was no solution.

But I swore to find one if I lived.

Solution X

IT NO longer mattered if men thought me demented. I called in Lieutenant Bud Roth and the scientists from F&M. If, when I had done, they hauled me away to the booby hatch, well, that's how it would be.

I briefed them on my study of the oscilloscope, my development of oscillograms from the oscillographs, my mastery of the *reading* of oscillograms.

At this point I left the six people in my basement, after instructing Roth how to use the oscilloscope. One of the professors was a camera crank. He was to make a record of any voice broadcast he chose. I would be called back downstairs to read it.

It was too simple.

I read the oscillogram from the pictures of the graph lines—and all six men nodded.

"At least I've proved the truth of what I say up to this point," I said. "Now, Roth, I've been receiving national and international acclaim for solving certain mysteries. I had nothing to do with them. I simply mirrored the wishes of the Osilans!"

"Come again?" said Roth, gulping a little.

"Oscillance?" asked Professor Caldorf, the oldest of the outfit. "Oscillance could refer to anything that is. Control rhythm and you control form, impulses, speech, color. . . ."

"Osilans," I said, "are *people*, perhaps the first people who ever lived on this earth. Esoterically they were known as the Will Born."

"Bosh!" said Caldorf. "Darwin has been accepted in principle on evolution for decades. Men came up from animals of some kind—and not very far up at that! Besides, what scientist can hold with rank mysticism?"

"Just the same," I said, "how do you explain my ability to solve mysteries? Do you believe in clairvoyance, crystal-gazing. . . ."

"More bosh!" snapped Caldorf. "What you've done will be explainable in simple scientific terms when we've studied the matter awhile. None of *us* is a member of the lunatic fringe!"

"Until I'm solved, whatever my new enigma is," I said, "let me tell you what *seems* to have been behind my ability to solve problems! And please don't interrupt, for I don't believe any of it myself—

except that I'm sure it happened! And bear one thing in mind: that piece of material you gentlemen told me must have come from one of the ocean Deeps *was banded to me under Emden Deep by one of the myriad of human slaves of the Osilans, who claim to be the Will Born!* They do not reproduce, nor are they androgynous, *they project—and we are their projections!*"

The graybeards battered their eyes, but did not interrupt me again as I told my story, *all* of it this time—except that I could not explain how, if water and land were a barrier to the Osilans, so that they could never come to the surface unless "freed," as I had freed the six, I had found under Emden Deep the very room in which, apparently in Lancaster, I had first visited with the people I called "albinos."

"Perhaps," I said at that point, "*matter* can be transferred back and forth, whether or not some weird application of Universal Law binds the Osilans personally to their caverns!"

"Matter," said Caldorf, unable to remain silent longer, "is energy. Vibrations are energy. One can be changed into the other by the scientist. Sound can be changed into color, man into mouse, tree into mountain—if the operator knows what changes to make in the vibrations. This is theory, of course. There is validity in the idea that the spheres make music. . . ."

I grinned at the old man and he flushed, knowing his statement came close to the implication that there was something beyond the scientist, in the realm of the esoteric, wherein man *might* find truth, if willing to burst the walls of "fact," "science," and prejudice against probing into what Herbert Spencer calls The Unknowable.

"I admit there is much we don't know, much to learn," said Caldorf testily. "But we've probed the inner earth with instruments; we've sounded the Deeps. . . ."

"A very little," I agreed. "If I could just give you some proof. . . ."

The radio wasn't even turned on when the green graph suddenly appeared on the small white screen—and I knew the graph to be an expression of Zeda. Somewhere she was listening in. And for the first time she was showing her graph to someone besides me! Maybe that indicated concern on the part of the Osilans, concern that we might find the secret of severance.

"There's an Osilans graph, that of Zeda, of whom I just told you!" I said. "Get a picture. . . ."

But there wasn't time, for suddenly we had company. Yes, Zeda! The men stared at her. She was a regal dame, I had to say that for her. I almost felt proud, for just a moment, of being her shadow. "Jay Bard has told you truth," she told them. "But I am warning all of you. If you *do* solve the secret of severance, you will destroy not only yourselves and all the people in the world, but all the world itself! Professor Caldorf, you spoke of the music of the spheres—somewhat skeptically, I must say. . . ."

"I used a common expression for lack of a scientific one!" said Caldorf raspingly.

"There *is* a music of the spheres," said Zeda, "which never began and will never end. Worlds and universes are strung on it like beads. Break the rhythm, end the music, or even interrupt it for a few seconds, and the macrocosm—and the microcosm—will dissolve into eternal chaos."

"But *you* disturb it?" I objected. "You project us—if we have the truth of the relationship between humanity and the Osilans—then you keep us in subjection by keeping us confused, with petty worries, with greed, thievery, and war!"

"The Great Law corrects and balances itself," said Zeda quietly. "It does it often, with cataclysms—earthquakes, cyclones, tidal waves, war! We can only tug and pull at the law, which always snaps back into balance. The music of the spheres is the theme song of the Great Law! It also *is* the Great Law. I warn all of you not to interfere with it!"

"Why?" I asked.

"You will cause great harm to yourselves, perhaps cause some catastrophe!"

"This worries you, and all the Osilans?" asked Caldorf, while the others merely stared at Zeda with their mouths open.

"We exist through our projections," said Zeda. "Without them we die of boredom—a kind of starvation difficult to explain to such *eminent* scientists."

"We must be close to the right answer," said Caldorf, staring, "or this lovely woman wouldn't appear here to argue with us—and to prove what I said awhile back, that you can change anything into anything else—as the alchemists of old always insisted—if you know how. Zeda here, for instance, changes herself into some kind of green wave, travels wherever she elects, becomes Zeda again. . . ."

"Or anything, or anybody, she cares to!" I added. "*Even six albinos!*"

I had told the scientists and Roth *everything*, including my "murder" of this same Zeda. Zeda, when I referred to the six albinos, hesitated briefly. Then she turned back to my oscilloscope, masking what she did with her body, and made some adjustments.

Five green rings came in through the walls, and there stood Thors and the missing four other albinos, bowing slightly to the rest of us! Zeda now turned to me, for the first time *asking* for something:

"You freed us," she said. "But we do not like the confusion we have built into the lives of our projections. Send us back to our safe and secure Deeps, *please!*"

I stared at her in open-mouthed astonishment. If I had expected *anything* from her, it was certainly not this!

"Send you back," I repeated dazedly, not believing it. "But your plans—weren't you planning to 'free' all the Osilans?"

Zeda smiled at me sweetly, too sweetly. "Not really, Jay. We've decided we don't care too much for your surface world. Besides, we've accomplished what we planned to do."

"Which was," I prompted, not expecting her to tell me, really.

"To keep man from destroying himself with his destructive urges," she explained somewhat enigmatically.

"And how did you—we—accomplish that."

Again the too sweet smile. "You'll understand—some day! And now, please send us back."

"I don't know how. I would be most *happy* to send you back. I've wondered what to do about you, free in the earth, three men and three women Osilans, if we should find the secret of severance. But how do I send you back?"

"Do you remember how you freed us?"

"Yes. I held two magnets, six times during an afternoon, before my oscilloscope. . . ."

"That's correct. Get the magnets. Reverse the poles. We shall change, one at a time, into primal energy. It's simple enough, really. It's the same essence that keeps every living entity operative and *alive*. Solve it and you've solved the secret of life. Please, Jay Bard, get the magnets and let us go back! I'll make a deal with you. I'll project more wealth, more power, more fame, into your life, than any other man on earth enjoys!"

"Now, Satan," I said to her, "you offer me all the cities of the earth! I might accept, but my price is a little higher."

"What is it? If it is possible, I'll pay it."

"You are one of the masters of vibrations," I reminded her. "What I ask, then, is possible to you."

"Agree, Zeda," said Thors. "No matter what it is. What difference does it make what it is, since it must be vibratory in some rate we can control?"

The other four albinos nodded.

"All I wish," I said, "is the secret of severance."

"I thought so!" said Zeda, not smiling, looking even a little sad. "But I shall tell you—and much good may it do you. *Adherence to the Great Law on the part of every human being, for so much as a complete microsecond*, will not only free all humanity but make each human being the equal of all others and of us!"

I knew she was giving me the straight truth. Roth knew, and Caldorf, and his associates. They nodded, shrugged. I sent the albinos, while the scientists watched with profound interest, back through the barrier to the Pacific Deeps whence they had come. But none knew, after they had gone, how albinos became green circles of strange energy, and vice versa—as if by their own will. But then, they were the Will Born.

"So," said Caldorf, "every human being on the face of the earth must live perfect harmony for a microsecond! Theoretically, it's possible. . . . There are something less than three billions of people on Earth. If a time could be set, far enough ahead, and the story, as Jay Bard has just told it, spread by word of mouth, by letter, by newspaper, by radio, television, wireless, even telepathy, we *can* reach every human being on Earth!"

I stared at them. Roth shook his head as the oldsters bent over my table and began making graphs on pieces of copy paper.

"One," said Caldorf, "two, four, eight, sixteen, thirty two, sixty four, hundred twenty eight . . . go on back thirty two times like that and you've a figure of tremendous proportions. . . ."

I knew that. I had several times in my life worked out the old story of how much a man would pay for getting a mule shod, using thirty two nails, paying a cent for the first one, two for the second, four for the third, and so on. It had amazed me how soon a man could run up a bill bigger than all the cash in the world!

But the oldsters were working it out, *theoretically*. Every human

being on Earth to obey the Great Law, all at the same time, for one single microsecond?

I left the scientists, unnoticed, and walked out of my house onto the lawn. It was hopeless. Mankind would never know severance, though he knew the secret—or soon would, when, with my permission, Roth and the oldsters prepared and told, with scientific exactness, the story of the Osilans and their shadows—which now the scientists *must* believe.

Their mumbling came up to me on my lawn, through the lighted cellar window.

Roth came out.

"It won't ever work, will it?" he said, lighting a cigarette.

"It has to, somehow, for we are being tricked again."

"Yes? How so?"

"Those Osilans haven't been returned to their Deeps. Zeda pulled a gag to take our minds off the Osilans, and set the minds of our scientists at work on the *modus operandi* of the Osilans. Zeda gave us the secret of severance for the same reason a hypnotist says, 'look me in the eye' or 'stare at this glass ball!' Our scientists in there—and tomorrow there'll be scores more, when the story is broadcast through the world—have been given the Osilans story. Each of them becomes, in effect, an oscilloscope, through which each one's individual projector, or Osilan, can appear in what to them is the outside world, *our* world."

"There's really no escape then?" said Roth.

"Yes, if somehow the thinker and the thought can be separated!"

I looked around. The moon was out.

"Take a look behind you," I said. Roth turned. "Your shadow!" I was already acutely aware of mine.

"So what?" said Roth.

"It's a symbol," I murmured. "I never can escape my shadow, not permanently, nor can it escape me. If I in turn am a projection—a shadow, if you please—what good does it do me to know the secret of severance?"

Through the window came the droning voice of the oldsters.

"After all," said the irascible voice of Caldorf, "a microsecond is only one one-millionth of a second. Surely that should be possible."

Roth looked at his shadow again. I looked at mine. Then we walked side by side across the lawn to Roth's car—neither of us

voicing the thought that only in the animated cartoons did shadow and substance occasionally sever relations.

Our shadows kept pace with us across the lawn.

XIV

The Secret Looms

IT WAS utterly impossible, and I knew it, that every human being in the world, at a given moment of time, could be halted, and for even one one-millionth of a second, induced to be as nearly perfect as humanly possible. Why, that would mean that for that period of time, brief as it was, man couldn't even think a thought of greed, lust, avarice, envy, jealousy. No wonder Zeda had so freely given us the secret!

But by the mere giving she had strengthened the hold the Osilans held upon us. I couldn't prove that. I didn't even *know* it, but I couldn't see Zeda and the "albinos" giving up as easily as they apparently had, and returning, with my help, to Emden Deep. The answer certainly must be that they had done nothing of the kind; they had only seemed to, for a purpose.

By now the story I had given the scientists was in the newspapers, on the radio and TV of the world. Every sprouting scientist in the world, of whatever age, would begin fooling with a home-made oscilloscope. Let someone write a story about space pirates, or interplanetary patrols, and people figured out ways to dress such stalwarts in garments that made it possible for them to live with or without oxygen.

Tomorrow night there would be a million oscilloscopes for every one that now existed. Graybeards would be slapping them together, Kids like young Loos would be building some that would really work.

Zeda had made a ten-strike, opening ways for as many Osilans as felt the desire to visit the outside world, up from and beyond the Deep.

But I wouldn't say anything to the scientists. They had seen Zeda and the albinos. They had seen them appear, become green blobs, vanish. They had taken Zeda's truthfulness for granted. How could I do that, fully aware as I was of imbalance—including falsity—in the world, produced by *people*, who were projections of Osilans, who thus could not themselves be perfectly in balance.

I'd once heard a reputedly learned esotericist make a remark; for which I had half expected him to be struck dead: "each of us is part of the body of the Almighty, or All powerful, whatever term you prefer. He is supposed to be perfect. If He were, we would be; since we are not, neither is He!" The man had not been struck by lightning. Now I believed I knew what he had meant, whether or not *he* did. But I did not make the mistake of regarding the Osilans as *Deity*.

The scientists extended themselves as they never before had. What they sought, in effect, was to bring the world to a standstill for one one-millionth of a second.

Possibly the man who managed the greatest listening audience in the world, up to his time, and possibly for decades yet to come, was Franklin D. Roosevelt. Reputedly he reached about one half the people of the United States! If he hadn't reached more, how could nameless scientists do better—and reach, as well, behind the Iron Curtain?

It couldn't be done. Zeda had of course known that or she would never have given us the secret of severance.

But there must be an answer. I began fumbling for it in the area in which she had given me another hint: the Osilans, to preserve themselves, must preserve *us*. If *we* vanished into dust they would die, she said, of an incomprehensible kind of boredom.

I hadn't believed her. The Osilans, if we vanished, would merely begin again, by projecting new men into the outside world. But at least such men would have to learn evil from the beginning again!

And who would those men be, if it ever came about? Had Zeda also told me truth when she had said we lived more material lives than one, that we lived through *many* lives on this Earth? If all the human beings on Earth were erased, and others were projected in their places, might they not be the same men, returned by the Osilans, and inheriting all the ancient evil? Might *I* not be erased, this instant, only to return tomorrow as someone else, somewhere else in the world—with only Zeda to connect me, as with an invisible umbilical cord, to "Jay Bard," who might or might not remember, or have "racial memories?"

I got nowhere. The scientists, their publicists, the great industrial tycoons, the men and women of all the world who made it go around, would get nowhere either, I was certain, but I became excited, along with them, in the slim possibility of reaching, and stilling, for one

one-millionth of a second, every human being in the world, from the foetus in the womb to the centenarian with his grizzled beard blowing toward his open coffin.

"If one human being fails," I was sure I heard Zeda murmur, "the project fails, and there is no severance."

I had been a military man. I knew at first hand of the man "who never got the word." In any group, however small or large, there was always one man late to muster, to assembly, who gave as his excuse: "I didn't get the word! Why didn't anybody tell me?"

In a world of billions how could there help being millions who would not get the word?

Yet the world was interested, and a time was set. The varying time-elements were worked out to perfection, so that no matter where a man was in the world, he could come to a full stop at exactly the same time as every other man in the world, and for one one-millionth of a second, become "like a bloomin' little angel!" as a Britisher put it.

"If the Deluge would come again. . . ." I thought. "But no, there never *was* an actual *world* deluge. The deluge in Noah's time was symbolical of another kind of deluge. . . ."

That took me back to Zeda, whose child I was. If I concentrated on her, would she not perforce give me some sort of answer?

There *wasn't* an answer! There was, as Zeda had said, but to put the answer together. But regimenting billions of human beings, some of them Andaman Islanders, some of them negritos, some of them Ituri Forest pigmies, just wasn't possible.

But the time came, that microsecond that might have rocked the world, if it had been a bomb big enough, with a great enough chain reaction, and of course the result was a failure.

However, four times as many people as ever had before, as nearly as statisticians could estimate, heard radio, viewed TV, synchronized watches, stared at the sun in lieu of watches, and "observed the microsecond!"

It wasn't enough.

Zeda proved that I had been right in one thing: she and her albinos hadn't returned to Emden Deep, or else were now able to travel back and forth at will. She appeared to me in my basement, before the oscilloscope.

"We couldn't allow it, you know, Jay," she murmured. "Thanks for all you've done to preserve the Osilans!"

"There may be a Deluge yet," I said, desperately. "There may be a scientific way to bring it about. If you can be slain by boredom, because man no longer exists on Earth. . . ."

Zeda, sitting in my favorite chair, shrugged.

"Man will never destroy himself," she said. "He's too selfish, thanks to Osilans influence. He may blow his world half apart, but a remnant will always remain!"

"There have been worlds before this one," I said. "Worlds *have* disintegrated. Races have vanished without trace."

"Correct, Jay," said Zeda, softly, "but every scientist on Earth capable of heroic destruction, of the human race, say, is projected by an Osilan—an Osilan who likes to keep on living!"

I was despondent beyond anything I had ever known. Idly I twisted the dials of my radio, and caught the final moments of a news broadcast:

". . . news for you: An English professor states that his country has successfully assembled a C-bomb—and plans to test it in the Australian desert soon! As you may know, the C stands for Cobalt—and this one is reputed to be far more powerful than the H-bomb! Where will it stop? . . ."

"It could wipe out the human race!" I whispered. "More effectively than any deluge. If they survived, of course, the Osilans could try again, but for a year at least, their projections would not be their slaves!"

Staring at the exquisite, satanic face of Zeda, I knew that the news meant even more to her than it did to me.

She looked wan and haggard, her eyes utterly frightened.

"The shadow and the substance *can* be separated," I said hoarsely, "and it doesn't have to be done by Walt Disney's artists, either! If man disappears, the Osilans. . . ."

As if to symbolize my meaning, Zeda became a green globe, to vanish through the wall of my basement.

* * * * *

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RATING SPACEWAY

We were both pleased and disappointed in the letter response following the first issue of SPACEWAY. Pleased in that our initial efforts were so well received and so generally approved. Disappointed in that there were not more letters. But we do most sincerely thank those who took the trouble to write us.

The general style and format of the new SPACEWAY was very generally praised, as was the high quality of the stories and illustrations. The cover by Mel Hunter drew well-deserved applause.

The stories were all well received, and as is natural, practically every one got at least one first place vote, and also every one a lost place vote. When the stories in any issue of any magazine receive such a diversified vote it means that all of them were of a high level of excellence, and that the reader had to make his choice simply on personal preference as to "type" of story. Thus, one who likes fantasy will give first place to a science fiction story that borders on fantasy; one who likes space opera will pick the yarn that lies in that category; the time-travel aficionado will pick one of them for first place, and so on.

But, over and above the choice of stories and pictures, articles and columns, comes another facet of magazine publishing for which all editors strive. This is brought out in one of the letters, received from Colvin Thomas Beck, of Hockensack, N.J. Beck writes, in part:

"However, there are other things that help make a successful sf/fantasy magazine besides 'stories.' A SF mag isn't just like any other type of fictional publication, meaning that you slap a batch of stories together, throw in some passing-foir interior and exterior illustrations, and shoot it off to the distributors. If a magazine doesn't have this one intrinsic ingredient, which was responsible years ago in the first place for popularizing sf/fantasy, it simply is 'another mag on another newsstand.' What is this ingredient? Well, I'd say that it is mostly personality, and how much of it there is in a sf/fantasy mag.

"To elaborate a bit further. I look all about me, as I have been doing for more than twelve years of active SF reading, and say to myself: the mags most resembling each other will be the most likely to drop out. And as I continue looking around me, I notice how many of the 32 odd SF mags being published lack distinction, fail in being original, and have taken so much to imitating one another. I don't mean to allude to such trivialities as a similarity in size, cover layout, or exterior and superficial interior designs, et al, but rather what goes into the mag contentswise.

"It all boils down to this, as far as what the basic constituents for the successful SF mag are: (1) Personal and warm editorials aimed directly at the reader, not ones resembling the style and pace found in large newspapers which are impersonal, abstract, and most of the time highly irrelevant . . . and (2) Articles, features, letter columns, and other non-fictional features designed to give a publication its own individuality and a 'trade mark' that may be able to help in differentiating it as much as possible from other SF magazines. 'Stories,' good, bad or indifferent, can be found anywhere today . . . But chances are more than likely that the reader will stick far more closely to the publication that he has come to regard as being aimed, personally, at him. This is personality. This I find in SPACEWAY."

This is the sort of letter an editor likes to get. It helps him do a better job in pleasing more readers all the time, for it gives him confidence that he is doing what he set out to do in the first place—publish a magazine that is enough different from, and better than, the general run of similar publications, to get and keep an ever-growing circle of satisfied readers. That is the main aim and purpose your editors have in mind; that is the principal thing that shall always be uppermost in our efforts.

Another reader, John D. Walston, of Vashon, Wash., brings up an interesting topic that confirms your editors' original belief in what SF readers want. He says (also in part): "I like especially your policy of using old-timers like Stanton A. Cablentz and Arthur J. Burks, along with the newer writers."

We have felt the same way, and will keep on trying to get you new stories by the Old Masters. They gained their title of "Old Master" not merely because they were among the first writers in this field, but because they could write excellent stories. You will see many more of them in SPACEWAY, along with the work of the talented newer writers.

Now for some specific reactions. There were votes both for and against a Letter Column, with the "ayes" better than two to one in favor. Therefore, as we get interesting letters, we will publish them. The votes for reviews of the fan magazines is against such a "waste of space" (as several writers call it), because a number of our friendly competitors are already doing this, and it would be merely a re-hash of the same thing. For that reason we do not contemplate one in the near future.

The old, old controversy between Science Fiction and Fantasy (and who is to say what line divides the two?) came up again in your letters. As one should have guessed from the title of our magazine—SPACEWAY—we plan this to be a "Science Fiction" magazine. But until someone comes up with a hard and fast rule as to just what is

"Science Fiction" and what is "Fantasy," some readers may from time to time accuse us of publishing an occasional "Fantasy" story, when we felt we were publishing a good piece of "Science Fiction." But, however you may classify them, we aim always, in every issue, to give you stories that are well-written, interesting, and thought-provoking; stories that will "stretch your imagination."

Richard N. Slayton, of Sarasota, Florida, writes: "I myself read SF for relaxation. I read a great deal of it, and am interested in watching the swing from the pure 'Buck Rogers' of just a few years ago, to the polished and sophisticated novels and stories of today. I feel, though, that there is room for a great deal of broadening of the aspect of SF. Competition between publishers may bring this about."

May we again ask our readers to write us about their reactions to our magazine, and especially to give us their ratings of the stories? While there are many things an editor has to take into consideration in planning his magazine policy and the contents of his future issues, we can assure you that we pay close attention to what our readers have to say.

We know, as you also realize, that we can never hope to hear from *all* of you. We know that the only way we can actually tell whether or not we are continuing to please our readers is by the issue-to-issue fluctuations or increases in sales. For the great majority of readers are the "non-vocal" type; the ones who read what they like, and quit reading when they no longer find what they like in any certain magazine.

But the ones who do write in help us immensely. It isn't merely a matter to us of whether or not Author A's story gets most of the first or last ratings, or whether Author B's story is generally panned as "lacking in good plotting, tight writing, or general interest"—much as we are guided by such comments.

No, the thing that is of greatest value to us is the "type" of story that is most generally liked; the "type" of story that is most generally panned. Because a certain yarn by Author A is panned, it doesn't necessarily mean that the same author's next story won't be acclaimed the "best in the issue." We cannot judge an author's work by the comments on any particular yarn of his.

But when, issue after issue, the stories that receive the most acclaim are all of a certain "type" (space travel, time travel, psychological, life on other planets, etc., etc.), and other stories of another "type" are generally criticized, then we know which sort of stories our readers want, and that knowledge will guide us in the selection of stories for future issues.

Garret Ford.



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